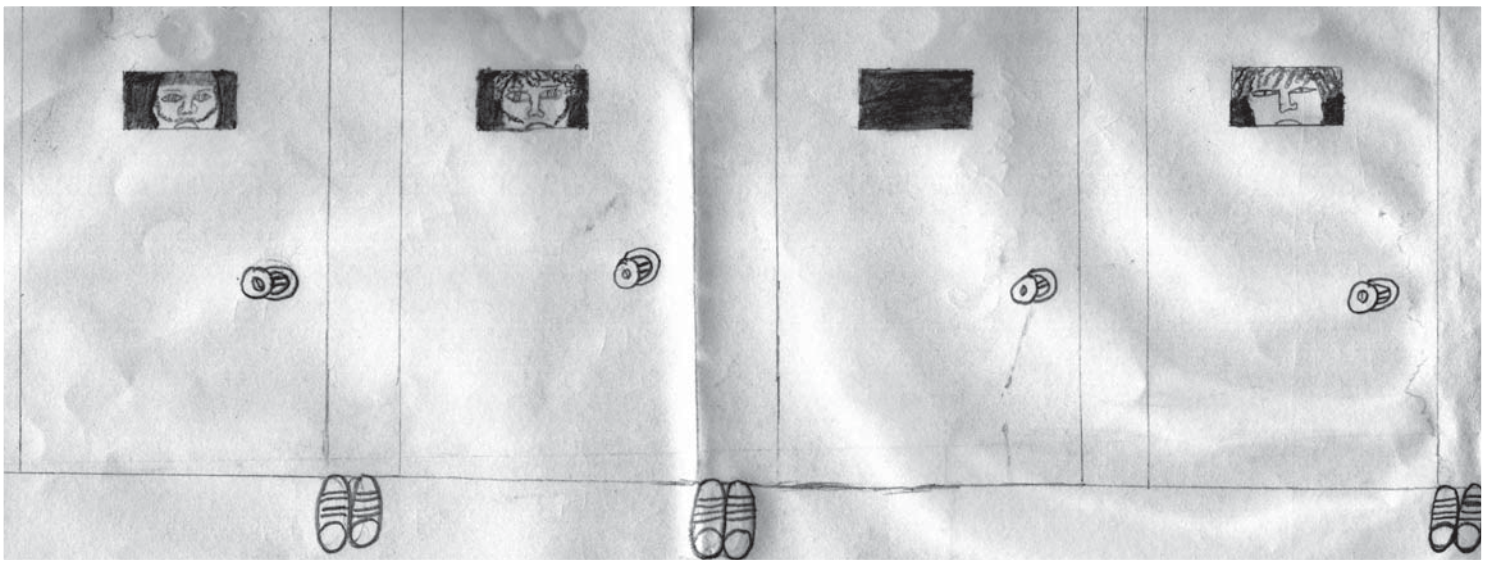
I rise like the sun every morning. I rise above all the stereotypes. I rise to fight for women's rights, rise stand and pray, and yes, I do it every day. I'm a young African-American young lady. Yes, I can act shady, but I choose not to do the foo'. Yes, I'm still going to schoo', 'bout to make a career in college. Please don't knock it.

check out the rest of Lil' Zilla's POW on page 4



EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 11.37

There are many reasons why working with and for The Beat Within is an honor and privilege in ways that no other work we've ever done can provide. One of those reasons is reading how some individuals are able to express their own experiences — even at a very young age — in ways that affect us as no other work could affect us. And even when we want something different for them and from them, and even when they've done things that we could never embrace, they make us want to embrace them as people, as human beings of value. They make us want to shout to our colleagues, our friends, the world — "Look! See what this child that you have dismissed with simple-minded slogans ("Thug," "Gangster," "Killer," "Thief") is capable of producing! Look! See what this human being is capable of thinking and becoming! Look and feel, and learn!"

This editor's note is devoted to just such a piece of writing, just such an individual writer. The piece, "Judgment Day," was not written to be an editor's note, but just "another piece" for The Beat Within. It was written by a 16-year-old boy who has spent the last two and half years locked up in his own little cell, isolated even from his peers (when not in CYA) who are also locked up. But the locks on his doors have not prevented from unlocking his mind and revealing the human soul that lies within.

We have been so moved by what James wrote, and what it tells us about the process of growth, a process that is ongoing, that we have read it aloud to many of our writing workshops, and we have seen how it has moved other young writers. The story he tells is a tragic one, on many different levels. But the emotional reality it expresses, and the power of the expression — the self-reflection, the love, the pain, the loss — these are the ingredients that makes The Beat Within what it is: a diamond of immeasurable worth lying right under the noses of a society rich in material possessions but impoverished of spirit, and blind to a treasure we see so clearly.

We have to believe that if those who hold the power over the lives of our young writers could read this piece (and others like it), they would understand why the empty and useless cliché, "Do the crime, do the time," is such an unproductive dead-end phrase that cheats the individual of his human potential and cheats the society — all of us — of the benefits of reaching for that potential.

That is not to say that individuals should not be held accountable for their actions, but only to say that punishment ought to be closely tied to a sense of personal and collective responsibility. If punishment has no connection to growth, if it is not tied to hope, if all it does is turn perpetrators into victims, then what purpose is being served? What future is it guaranteeing? These are the questions we have pondered, and wish more people would ponder, as they truly listen to this voice and consider the human capital that is represented by this publication and embodied in this piece.

Judgment Day

Well Beat, it has finally come time for me to face my judgment day, although I'm not referring to facing the Lord and His unavoidable judgment. I'm instead referring to those twelve people and judge who will determine my unfortunate fate. I find myself with many mixed emotions floating through my mind, for after waiting two and a half years for this day to finally arrive, I'm not too sure I am as eager to go on with it as I was a year ago. Although I can say that I am curious to see how much time I'm gonna get, I'm not looking forward to sitting there while the DA describes me in front of my loved ones as a monster and how I should be locked up for the rest of my life.

I already have come to terms with the fact that with me living the life I chose and with the decisions I have made. The possibility is very high that I may never see the streets again, but my family seems to have this unseen hope that I will be out in a number of years. Visits with my mother, it never fails for her to mention about how when I get out, we are gonna move to Mexico. Just me, her, and my son, where no one can interfere with our lives and where I can find myself a good woman. Inside, as I listen to her reveal her dreams to me, it feels as though my heart is being stomped on and spit on by the devil. I dare not tell her that my attorney is talking about a hundred and six year plea bargain, for I'd rather not break her pure, little heart.

I can still remember back to the lovely times when I would refuse to go to sleep without giving her a good night kiss or when she would call me and my little brother in from outside to eat her delicious food that she had prepared for the family. She always brings those days up these days and I always tell her to stop before she ruins my visit. I must admit, though, that with me finding myself in the situation that I do, it is a pleasant retreat to just lay back at night and think of those times in the past. Damn, time just seems to fly in this world. Being seven, I never thought that seven years later, I would be in a very serious battle for my life with the State of California, or even a mere three years later, I would be in a race with the other homies my age to see who can grow up the fastest.

It seems to be that as the days come closer to the day I will stand trial for allegedly killing two people, these memories of my childhood and still present teen 'hood stay in my mind. I could sit here and try to explain to you why and how my life has turned out this way, but I will refrain from doing that because through all the loop holes and turns, the arrow will still always and forever point to one person and one person only, which is myself. I am the one who decided to live this life and I am the one who at a very young age, wanted to be locked up because the big homies were locked up, and I unfortunately, am the one who chooses to continue to live this life that will surely only promise me nothing but a deeper journey into this abyss. People like to talk to me about change, but when you've walked in these shoes as far as I have, then change no longer seems to be an option.

Maybe in the future, the next generation will see that it's more beneficial for them to stay in school and strive to be something in life than to kick it on a street corner. Well, in conclusion to this piece, I will share a saying that my father once told me at a visit. He told me, "Well mijo (son) what can you do? You paid for the band, so dance...."

-James

We would love to hear your thoughts on this very sad yet powerful piece too, if you care to share with The Beat Within.

Moving right along, the topics addressed in our workshops prior to the writing were, "In The Way" -We know some of you don't have any desire to change your ways for reasons we have yet to understand. But we also know there are those of you who really want to walk a straight path, yet find yourselves having to move mountains in order to do so. What we want to know this week is what people, places, and/or things stand in the way of you doing something positive with your life?

We'd like for you to think about this as much as you can within this short workshop because sometimes things stand in the way without us even knowing. Do your friends get in the way? What about the block? Or maybe things less obvious like family? Or even school? What stands in the way of you living a positive life?

Our second topic, "What's Making You Stronger?" —There are things in all our lives that bring us down, that make us want to give up. But there are other things that bring us up, that make us stronger and help us get through the hard times. We want to know about those things — the things that are helping you get through these times and move you towards a more positive future. Have some of the mistakes you've made in life made you stronger (by knowing what to avoid)? Does the strength of family support and love give you strength? Are you learning lessons from those who have traveled this road before you that will make your journey easier? What The Beat wants to know is what is making you stronger, and what is making it easier for you to make it through this temporary setback to a better future.

Lastly, and we can't believe this, the not so popular, "Beat Anniversary Topic" -Who would have ever imagined that back in September 1996 that The Beat Within would be the publication that it is today? Who would have ever imagined that we would conduct over 50 writing workshops in various juvenile halls a week by 2006! Who would have ever thought that this publication would reach so many of you, and the number of special relationships that have stemmed from this amazing work. Who would have thought that this good work — The Beat Within — was born when Tupac died and we printed the powerful responses to his death way back in 1996. Given this is beginning of our eleventh year, we want to celebrate The Beat Within and the importance of 2Pac this week with your take on the following Pac lyrics. Tell us what these lyrics from Tupac Shakur's "Dear Mama" mean to you, and how you relate to them.

"Dear Mama"

"Now, ain't nobody tell us it was fair/No love from my daddy 'cause the coward wasn't there/He passed away and I didn't cry/ 'Cause my anger wouldn't let me feel for a stranger/They say I'm wrong and I'm heartless/But all along I was lookin' for a father he was gone/I hung around wit' the thugs/And even though they sold drugs/They showed a young brotha love."

Before we announce this week's POW recipients, allow us to remind you of our 16th editor's note writing contest! The contest question to consider writing on is, "A Letter To The President." For this contest we want you serious writers to write a letter to President Bush! It is our goal to not only post these letters in The Beat Within publication and our website, but to send them off to the White House too! Now, do we need to suggest topics on what to talk about? Doubt it. So with this said, our contest question is all about you writing a letter to President Bush.

The deadline, deadline will be Election Day, Tuesday, November 7, 2006. As is the case with all of our writing contests, that all pieces submitted will be featured in the BWO (Beat WithOut) section of the "big" Beat over several issues. And once all featured, The Beat editors will read and vote on their four favorites. From these reads, our top-vote-getter will receive a one-hundred-dollar money order. Our second place winner will get a fifty-dollar money order. And our third and fourth place winners will receive twenty-five-dollar money orders. Good luck writers!

Ok, lets give praise to this week's POW recipients, they are Meen and Whiteboy from SF/YGC, Jacob, Amber, Big Vic, Deshawn from the 150 Crew, Lil' Zilla from Walden House, Cruz from Marin, Xavier and Treymayne from Arizona.

Awesome writers! You all step up huge!

This week we send this issue out to all you guys and gals at or are going to CYA alternatives. May you do a great program at your placement as you prepare for the day you return home where you will hopefully stay for good.

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

Co–founders: Sandy Close and David Inocencio

Senior Editors: David Inocencio

Assistant Editors: Michael Kroll, Allan Martinez

Graphics/Layout Editor: Manen Pau

Staff: Pauline Craig, Jill Wolfson, Joanna Lin, Allan Tinker, David Muhammad, Patricia Johnson, Amanda Ables, Omar Turcios, Mervyn Wool, Dennis Morton, Sheerly Avni, Danielle Moore, Linette Kim, Roy Hodgson, Eric Strenger, Danielle Worthy, Brittany Bernard, Brahmani Houston, Hanif Bey, Carolyn Goosen, Perry Jones, Scorpion, Will Roy, Zoe Torres, Keir Davidson, Vincent Garza, Jennifer, Allison Huang, Samantha Jay.

The Maricopa County, Phoenix, Arizona, Juvenile Probation Department Beat Staff: Joe Szulecewski, M.A., Lisa Donsker, M.C., Hillary Shluker, M.C., Lisa Karczewski, M.A. The detention staff are: Tammie Utter, Shannon Lechner, D. Scott Herrmann, Ph.D. Clinical Director.

Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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PIECES OF THE WEEK

Stop Now! This Is Your Second Chance

Everyone wants to help us and say that certain thing that will change our life forever and do good. Everyone has heard something that will send you in the right direction. But as hard as they try, it won't happen.

If you want to change, then you gotta talk to yourself. Ask why you livin' the way you livin'. Sometimes, even when we think we be lyin' to ourselves, even tryin' to be something tough and won't consider bein' good. How you gonna decide on something if that's all you know?

All you gotta do is ask why. Why is hella people rich and livin' right and I'm screwed up in my situation. Just think about what's different between them and us. Just try to figure it out. Like one of the most important question: why are we doin' what we doin'? And whatever that reason is, is it worth it?

Think about the future and what could happen and what could never happen in these life styles. And it don't hurt to think about it 'cause it's not like anybody is readin' your mind. Think about it 'cause it's not like anybody is reading your mind. Think about this, and not only when you mad, but also when happy, when you sad, when you bored.

Some people in prisons went in at like 20 years old, screaming that this was the way life is, and 20 years later they a changed person, hella smart and wise, and should be let out of prisons. But they still there. Just read the BWO. It's not that they suckas and started obeying laws because they had enough (maybe for some), but it's because they realize the shhh they was doing was wrong. They ain't bowin' down to the law, they just understand that what they doin' was messed up. Took some people 15 or 20 years to learn that.

Why you gotta go through all that just to realize the shhh you doing ain't right? Killin' people that look exactly like us and going through the same exact shhh we going through, gettin' played by the same people, and that's the government or system. We got anger 'cause the shhh we been through. That person from the other side of town didn't do that to you.

The system set shhh up so your mom could be a crackhead and shhh. All this shhh we doin' is gettin' old — people dyin', gettin' L's in prisons. Little crackheads and shhh that would ruin somebody for 20 bucks. We doin' this to ourselves even though the system set it up this way. Our minds could be free as In seeing somebody else's point of view or wanting something else besides the ghetto. But we live in a box and that box is our mind because we don't think about shhh besides our 'hoods or besides bustin' somebody or poppin' or smokin' or drinking, besides robbin' someone or having sex with women. We don't ever want to wear a different outfit because everyone else wearing the same shhh.

We don't ever think about anything outside the ghetto besides mansions or something like that. There's way more shhh in life than the situation we grew up in, and that, my friend, is the box. I bet all those people in prisons would want another chance, or at least get out of prisons. Before you say, "Damn, I should've listened to what people was telling me," you got a second chance, and that second chance is right now.

Whenever you get out and you 'bout to do some dumb shhh, think about what could happen and think about the consequences. That moment right there could be your second chance.

-Meen B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Another fine example of you using your brain, thinking things out, analyzing both the big picture (the system) and the little picture (individual choice). Unfortunately, you're in a classic Catch-22 situation: even though you begin by saying that nothing people say will change anyone's behavior (which only comes from talking to yourself), you are also saying some very important things that you hope will change people's behavior (and we hope so, too). As we have said many, many times, the system will just keep going as it has (it continues to grow and get rich off your backs), so real change — the kind that leads to successes and not to prisons — can only come from individuals like you who understand that the world is much bigger than what you know so far — and worthy of exploration. —

Rise

I rise like the sun every morning. I rise above all the stereotypes. I rise to fight for women's rights, rise stand and pray, and yes, I do it every day. I'm a young African-American young lady. Yes, I can act shady, but I choose not to do the foo'. Yes, I'm still going to schoo', 'bout to make a career in college. Please don't knock it.

But still I rise each and every day. Some days I feel like shhh because I'm being treated like shhh because of my skin pigment. Black-on-black crimes... my Latino's gang banging, thinking that's the spirit. Us as minorities need to stick together! Don't let anyone speak down on you. We don't need to do the foo'.

We are the most hated races. You know who you are — can't walk down the street and get food to eat... I'm broke, I'm starving, let's feast on top ramen, or step it up and make a spread. That's all mommy could afford.

Please! "No more locked doors!" Away from home in juvie hall is what I used to call home. Do you know what "nigga" mean? No, but you sho know what "nigger" mean. Don't get mad. Now, wipe away that frown. Don't use it if you cant tell me what it mean, yada-da-mean? It's that word that got my people hurting today, and it's only six letters. Choose yours.

Those words hurt, but still I rise. RISE!

-Lil' Zilla, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Wow, Lil' Zilla. You hit us with both barrels: calling first on those behind these locked doors to rise above, to free themselves, to "stick together," and calling on all of us, second, to recognize the poisonous and debilitating effects of racism in all its ugly forms. (We overruled our rule about the use of the "N" word because we could see no way of making the important point you needed to make without using the word.) We cannot predict anyone's future (including our own), but we are willing to bet that your haunting refrain, "but still I rise," will continue to carry you to new heights. This is a powerful piece of writing, affirming the positive but letting no one off the hook.

I Give Myself Strength

I'm stayin' strong 'cause I already know I'm gone be out. And if I do my program almost to perfect I getter go home wit' no probation. Data will make it all beta, for real dough, then I just need to stop committing' crimes and I'll be fine which I could do.

Also my grandparents keep me strong. Day done stuck wit' me for hello long. And dye didn't have to at all day. Could just let me move into another foster home! But dey haven't. So when they come to visit me I know I could do it 'cause I got people in my corner! Not da corner on da block. In my life! So wit' knowin' I got peeps in my corner gives me strength to get out and stay free.

And last but certainly not least I give myself strength and tell myself I could do it. That really make me wanna do it 'cause it's for me, young Whiteboy. So do what chu do 'cause I'ma do me! So we'll see what da future holds for me.

-Whiteboy B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Yes, we'll see what the future holds for you, but we can see that you've already set yourself on a path towards a brighter future than the recent past, and we congratulate you for it! We hope you keep to that determination not to commit any new crimes because, of course, that is the critical choice you have to make to stay out of places like this. But most of all we give you props for recognizing that you are your own greatest strength, and that by believing in yourself and your future you make yourself much stronger in every aspect of your life.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

The Physique of Pain Found

harassed
by broken attempt
as the beckoning
won't dismiss itself
forgotten a lot more
than the damage
that was caused
for someone to hurt
exactly like this
but pain is more remembered
than the love
all because
one is more recent
than the other
but no matter what
the suffering's the same
when emotions are played
revenge is the name
of relief for some
but not all scars
are sometimes way too deep
for us to refill and retreat
why these things
we have to learn
through war and battle
i do not know

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Revenge heals nothing and never can, except the egotistical vanity of a selfish man. This indeed is learned through war and battle, when ignorant lust for power sits in the captain's saddle. If we must use metaphors of war to describe the suffering of the human heart, let's look toward Gandhi not Al Capone to play the teacher's part. One sought to kill his enemies and died in jail, while the other practiced love, overcame his enemies from above, and walked out of jail to be hailed the father of his country. Stop mirroring those who hurt you, letting their pain convert to hate — or finding love will never be your fate.

Polluted Minds

When I take a look at my self,
I see a son who's mind is polluted.
A young man needing help,
his life not yet concluded.
Heading down a path were our enemy's laugh.
At our failure
Be we strive for success, doing our best, but our best seems
too little to the rest
So we stress.
Clouded is our vision, we refuse any wisdom which is
taught to us.
We sit at the back of the bus looking at others,
disrespecting our mothers.
Acting a fool at school
But instead
chill out
Help yo' mom clean the house.
Do yo' work at school.
Seems so dumb
but listen son
you get it better than those killed in a slum.
Do what we can why we still young.
So as we take my last whiff of this polluted mess
I chill, respect elder and by me doing this
I get respected rewarded.
Detected for my efforts.
I'm MC underground
Listen to my wisdom

- Xavier, Durango/Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Looks like you've been doing some thinking. Sometimes giving advice is easier than following it. We hope you stay strong and continue to take your own advice. You got a strong voice and we hope others will listen to your wisdom.

we strive for success, doing our best, but our best seems too little to the rest

Faith Is Victory

now they can lock me up and throw away the key
but i'll always have jesus right next to me
try to destroy my soul and kill me mentally
standing tall like a giant, never known to flee
people always ask how am i still alive
then i reply, only the strong survive
give me a year, matter of fact give me five
still walkin' out with my head held up high
i can sit on the curb and watch the world pass by
and realize it's full of evil, deception and lies
but luckily i'm blessed with the strength to overcome
these obstacles
prevail against these demons because my heart is
unstoppable
stand up for your beliefs because faith is victory
a hater always hates, so i ignore his bickering
the darker the valley, the brighter god makes me shine
play the cards that i'm dealt, never complain or whine
only god can judge me, so i say forget the law
one love to all those locked up from the pen to the hall

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Though they say Jesus is the final judge at the end of time, here on earth he befriended all sinners and forgave all crimes, asking only for repentance: a change of heart and mind — to admit our wrongs with honesty and contrition, and turn away from hate and greed, were his sole conditions for salvation. The law written in a heart of love was itself, the only law he required us to set above all else. Keep faith in that and Jesus will always watch your back. In fact, victory is already yours, even if the passage of time must still be endured.

What Makes It Easy

I have made the worst choice in my life... Saying "yes" to drugs, smoking weed caused me to quit school, it wasn't entertaining enough.

Smoking weed caused me to drink, drinking caused me to do things without thinking, come home after curfew, lie to my father, which caused me to lose his trust.

Loosing my father's trust lost me more and more freedom and privileges, which caused me to run away. The stress with no stable home caused me to pop pills, which caused me to rob and steal, just to take my pain away. Popping pills caused me to snort powder, made me feel I didn't have a worry in the world.

Now I'm here in juvenile hall wishing, I could go back, you never know what you have until it's gone. Wishing I could live the normal life of a 16 year old girl.

To everyone out there: drugs have a lot to do with the decisions you make. Without them would it be so easy to lie, to kill, to hurt, to steal...? To run away from your loved ones (parents)? From flunking in school because of weed, to killing because of pills, to stealing or selling your baby for crack.

Each one will effect your life...

Each one is not loving yourself enough...

-Abuser, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow, this is such an impressive piece. We love how you laid it all out like a row of dominoes, one thing leading to the next in a spiral of reactions. Most times we don't see the big picture as it's happening, and it's not until after things have played out that we can see how one thing led right to the next. Well done.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Las Pérdidas De Mi Vida

Esta es mi triste historia. La historia de esa persona que su vida se fue abajo. Mi vida se lleno de muertes a mi alrededor y no pude hacer nada. Principalmente cuando naci en El Salvador. Mi mama me dejo con mi abuela y mis dos hermanos, mi hermano mayor y menor. En ese tiempo los años fueron pasando. Cuando tenía 10 años mi hermano mayor se vino a vivir con mi mama a Texas y nos quedamos solo mi hermano pequeño con mi abuela. Fue muy duro porque las pandillas no nos dejaban en paz. Siempre andabamos ullendo de ellos.

Cuando tenía 16 años, le dije a mi papa y a mi mama que si me ayudaba a venirme a los EEUU. Ellos me dijeron que era muy peligroso que me viniera solo. Un primo que había vivido en los EEUU estaba en El Salvador y me dijo que si me quería venir con el y le dije que estaba bien. Entonces nos venimos cruzando froteras. La migración nos detubo y estubimos en un cuarto de menores. A mí primo que era mayor de edad lo deportaron.

Cuando estaba estaba en el centro de menores (en migración) mi mama falleció de un derrame cerebral y no la pude ver. No supe nada de lo que había pasado hasta el día siguiente que llame a El Salvador donde mi tía, la hermana de mi mama. Solamente me dijeron, "acabamos de enterrar a tu madre." Ustedes pueden imaginar que pense en ese momento. Fue muy duro estar ahí encerrado sin poderla verla por ultima vez. No la había visto por 14 año y ahora tengo 17 años.

Despues de 6 meses el primo con el quien yo me vine aqui, fallecio y no solo eso, despues de un año de haber muerto mi mama, mi hermano murió en El Salvado atropellado por un carro. El tenía 14 años. ¿Como creen que me siento. Dios es grande y poderoso y le doy gracias a El por haber permetido tener a esa familia.

From The Beat: Dios sabe por que haces las cosas. Sabes, no tenemos palabras como decirte cuanto sentimos tus pérdidas. Algún proposito ha de haber en todo esto. Gracias a Dios te dio la fuerza para aguantar todo esto. No dejes de pedirle a Dios que te siga dando las fuerzas para seguir adelante. Quisieramos hacer algo por ti, pero contra la boluntad de Dios no se puede. Estamos seguro que algún día estaras reunido con tus seres querido que has perdido. Ahora ya estas aqui y si te dan la oportunidad de quedarte usala para un mejor futuro para ti. En esta vida no estas solo. Hay gente buena que te brindaran la mano algún día. Sabemos que no estas aqui por malas cosas, si venistes de tal lejos y pasastes por mucho, no lo tires todo a la basura. Sigue adelante y gracias por tu honestidad y dolorosa expresión.

The Losses In My Life

This is my sad story. The story of that person whose life went downhill. My life was filled with deaths and I couldn't do anything. Mainly, when I was born in El Salvador, my mother left me with my grandmother and my two brothers, my older brother and my younger brother. During that time, the years were passing by. When I was 10 years old, my older brother came here to live with my mother in Texas and my younger brother and I were left alone with my grandmother. It was very hard because the gangs would not leave us in peace. We were always running from them.

When I was 16 years old, I told my father and my mother if they could help me come to the United States. They told me that it was very dangerous for me to make the journey here by myself. A cousin of mine, who had previously lived in the U.S., was in El Salvador, and he asked me if I wanted to come over here with him, and I told him that it was all good, so we came, crossing borders. The immigration police detained us and we were in a room for youth. My cousin, who was overage, was deported.

When I was in the center for youth (in immigration) my mother passed away due to a cerebral hemorrhage and I couldn't see her. I did not know anything about what had happened until the following day when I called my auntie in El Salvador, my mother's sister. They only told me, "We just got through burying your mother." Y'all can imagine what I was thinking at that moment. It was very hard to be there, locked up, and not get the opportunity to see her for one last time. I had not seen her for many years and now I am 17 years old.

Six months after this incident, the cousin, whom I had traveled to the U.S. with, passed away and not just that, a year after my mother passed away, my brother died in El Salvador when he was hit by a car. He was barely into his teen years. How do y'all think I feel? God is great and mighty and I thank Him for having allowed me to have that family.

-Cruz, Marin

From The Beat: Your God knows why He does the things He does. You know what? We're at a loss for words to describe how we feel about your losses. There must be some purpose as to why all this happened. Thanks to God, He gave you the strength to withstand all this. Don't stop asking God to continue giving the strength to continue striving forward. We wish we could do something for you, but it would against your God's will and we can't do anything. One day, you will be reunited with the loved ones that you have lost. Now, you are already here, and if they give you the opportunity to stay in this country, use it to make a better future for yourself. In life, you are not alone. There are good people out there that will extend their hand to you someday. We know that you didn't come to this country to do bad things because you did travel very far and went through a lot just to get here. Don't throw all that hard work in the garbage. Continue striving forward and thanks for your honesty and painful expression.

Back in Louisiana

My name is Deshawn. I am 16 years old and I stay with my mom and my sister. My sister is 15 years old. My mom is a program counselor, and she manages a shelter.

My dad lives in Louisiana, he built a house there. He don't work no more, he just drills for oil and sells it. The last time I saw him was three months ago. We went hunting in his back yard with a nine millimeter and a rifle – 'cause he's got a big backyard, like a rainforest. This was my first time going to Louisiana, and it was different from here. It was like country, and I didn't see no people at all... just woods and horses.

I liked it at first, but then I didn't because there were no friends around.

But I didn't get in trouble there. I got in trouble here, when I took my dad's gun. He thought he'd forgotten it in the house, but I had it with me in the car when we drove all the way across country to come back here.

I was here sellin' guns and I got chased by the police. I'd hidden the gun and someone told on me. My dad was mad, and that's when he went back to Louisiana.But we talk all the time.

"I remember when you was a kid and you always used to cry." he said. "You went from crying to stealing cars to selling drugs to doin' time."

He hopes I get my life together, and writes me to say he don't want me out here no more, he wants me to go back and live with him.

I think that's messed up, 'cause I don't know nobody out there. But he thinks sending me out there with him is gonna keep me out of trouble.

He's a little right, but then he's wrong at the same time.

-Deshawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you compared here and there, which is the place where you think you'd be most likely to get in trouble? It sounds like your dad loves you, like he'd do anything to help you grow out of this dangerous activity and move on to become a man who can be proud of himself. If you DO go to Louisiana, be sure to write us and tell us how life out there. Good luck!

My Youth

I saw my mom get shot right in front of my eyes
By my own dad at the age of five
Lucky for me she survived the shots
But to this day I still don't understand why he wanted her to drop
I could remember like yesterday banging on some ladies door
Trying to get help from all of the horror.
She was on the ground and he was on top
Wrestling over the gun I heard the gun pop.
Now my dad is doing hard time. Twenty-three years is all he got

-Tremayne, Durango/Maricopa County Arizona

From The Beat: Wow, it sounds like you witnessed violence at a young age. This must have been very traumatic. It is important to not repeat the cycle of violence. How can you stay out of this kind of violent life style? It is important to find positive people and activities to lead a healthy and positive life style

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

The Beautiful Woman On TV

I wish...
What can I be?
That beautiful women on TV.
I wanna be her so I can have people wanna be me!
It seems really hopeless
I must confess
My life started out a mess
I wish, I'm that star
That I shine!
Were are all waiting in line
So we can be that person
Where somebody say, "She a star! She look fine!"
I'll be in waiting line
Why does my heart have to burn why do I suffer
Why can't I wish and it can come true
I don't want this world to end, then my wish come true
I wanna be number one, not number two
I wish that my wish one day it will come true
So I can be that super star
Then, in my life, I will go far
So I can be head of the line of the bar
But think about its fantasies and dreams don't always come true
You get to believing and I believe will my believing get me far?
They say make a wish will that green frog give me that wish if I give it a kiss?
It's all on me I only have the answer the power over me
One day I'll say to somebody my wish came true
I'll always do something no matter what it is
"I wish"

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We all wish at times that we were someone other than who we are today. Your experience may seem challenging, but in the end, if you are a survivor, you will prevail. What is your dream? Is your dream to be an actor on TV? If so, then you need to get into school and give acting a shot. In your next piece tell us your plan!

Avoid Roadblocks

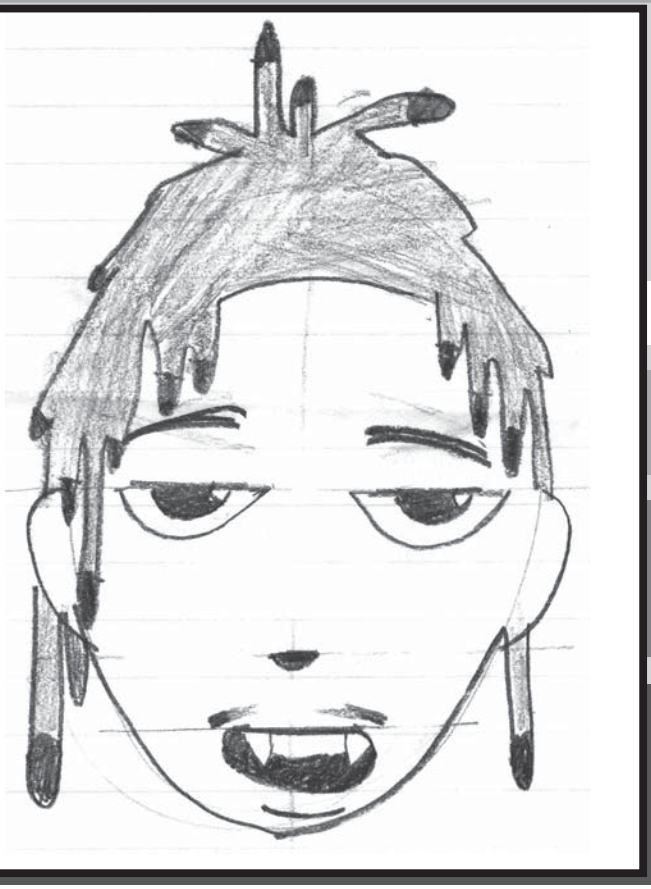
Many things get in my way each day. I try to be a better person. It also is in the eye of the beholder, because you also allow things and people to get in your way by the situations you find yourself in.

It's not hard to avoid roadblocks if you know how to identify them. The more that you live with strong ambition, the higher the chance of success is. If you look for things that can get in your way, you shall surely find them. I believe if you keep your head up and see each outcome with positivity, then it's easier to live past the things that are made to get in your way.

-Sebastian, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Strong ambition is key, but not if it's chained to acting impatiently. Strong ambition plus flexibility, like the grass in a strong wind instead of a tree that first stands tall then comes tumbling down with a crashing sound unable to bend — flexible in adjusting goals to realities without switching to "ends justify the means", that's the kind of strong ambition one needs to succeed.

That beautiful women on TV.
I wanna be her so I can have
people wanna be me!
It seems really hopeless



Change

What's up Beat? My patna is waiting for me to get out right? But when I do he's going to have these things waiting for me - purple, pills, privilege, and girls. That's coo' or what not but I ain't in to that anymore. I have other plans for myself. Doing that stuff ain't going to do nothing but bring me back in here. The sad part is I'll be 18 when I get out so if I do choose to do something wrong, I'll be going somewhere a lot worse, feel me?

My girl that I've been talking to since the 7th grade knows that I'm trying to have a better life for myself. She doesn't want me kicking it with my old patnas because I know they are all going to be doing the same mess when I get out. I'm going to be on a whole new level and they're going to be jealous because I'm going to be doing my own stuff and be legit. I'mma stop banging and just work on me.

I want to help my boy but I don't think my mom's or my girl is going to approve of it. They'll probably say you don't have to worry about nobody else but yourself,. But I don't want to see my boy go out like that. I don't want my boy to end up on my hoody or in jail. I want to know what should I do?

-Byrd, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Well we can't tell you what to do cause only you know what's best for you but we can offer a little guidance. We admire and respect that you are serious about making a better life for yourself. We like that you are thinking about your future and seeing that all the other mess is nothing but a distraction. We also think you are lucky to have some strong women in your life who truly have your back and want the best for you. It's going to take time to get your life in order and it's going to be hard. We know you care about your friend but you need to focus on you first. When you are ready, go back and try and help your boy. We know you are thinking it might be too late but what's the alternative? We hate the thought of a young man losing his life to the streets but we really hate the thought of two young men losing their lives.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

This World Ain't No Game

This world ain't no game
Moms and dads feel tha pain
This world ain't no game
People get shot and people die
This world ain't no game
I hope everybody who's reading
Feel the same
This world ain't no game
When people die
Some people laugh and some homies cry
And some people's mothers say
"Why? Why? Why?"
This world ain't no game

-Baby Purp B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Now this is what we're talking about, Baby Purp. You say you hope that everyone who's reading this feels the same, so we have to ask: "Are you reading your own words? Do you feel the same?" You've described the reality of the world you live in very well, and yet you still are unwilling to leave this world behind? Why? Is it because you don't know how to do anything else? If that's the reason, there are people and programs that can help, if you just ask (counselors, The Beat, teachers, social workers, etc.) It takes a lot of courage to walk away from the familiar and into the unknown? Are you scared to do that? We understand if you are, but we can tell you that the fear you feel when you think about change begins to disappear as soon as you realize you are capable of living a different kind of life. And you are capable. The only question is are you willing to?

Tired Of Cutting Class

For the last couple years I've put smoke in the air
Poppin' pills in pairs
Sippin' forty-ounce beers
Livin' life wit'out care
Pullin' licks wit' my click
But now the shhh getting thick
So I think it time to quit but shhh,
It's kinda hard for me, foo'
'Cause my crew don't wanna lose a hustla to the schoo'
Sayin', "Look Majik dude, forget them books, my 'cause
We gonna hit this big lick while you watch for the fuzz
But w'at my ninja don't get, I tired of cuttin' class
And my only math comin' from breaking down a half
So I got to push past these cats in my way
And not be made into just a failing ninja from the bay

-M Majik B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't know how long you've been doing this, but we're glad you're tired of it. And we're even more encouraged that you recognize the importance of school to your successful future. The fact that your homies haven't matured to the same degree that you have is their problem, not yours. Your problems may not be entirely behind you, but if you follow the course you lay out here (and especially avoiding the 40s and the pills), then we think you're well on your way towards a different — and better life.

Own Up And Grow Up

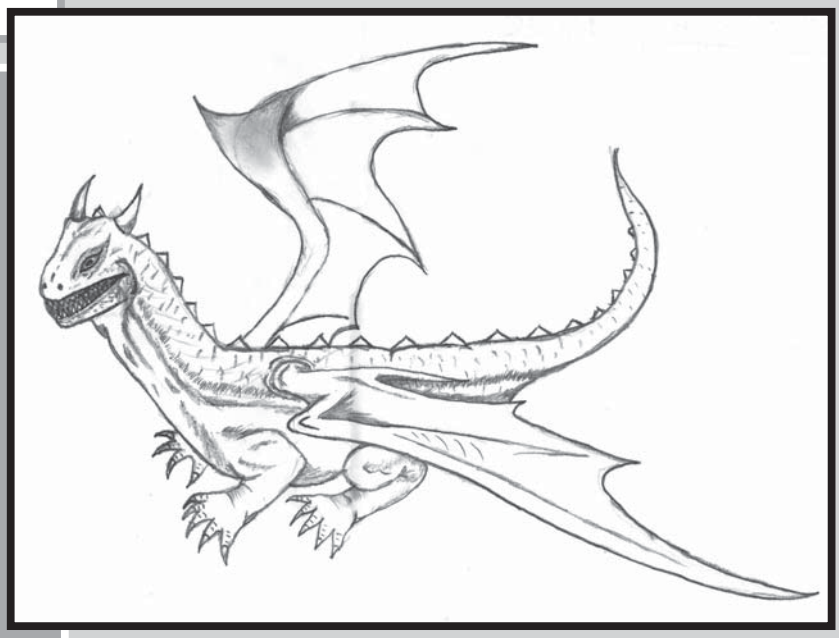
Own up to what you did. The system is screwed up, but they don't get you to break a law. The law and our community are intertwined. Crack was put in the community and the law cracks down on crack sellers. Jail is a million-dollar industry. So you are most likely going to fall in this web of this industry (system).

But there is hope, there is always hope. You are not permanently in the system unless you killed someone. Stop complaining about the system and get out of it. Get out of it by owning up to what you did and break the cycle of in and out, in and out. Get out and stay out. Stop being a victim of the system and conquer the system. I know it 'cause I done done it and some mo' shhh...

To you violent types know this: SENSI is the healer of the nations as it says in the Bible. (The leaves of the tree will heal Nations.) Jah bless.

-The Yung Ethay Ro Ro B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Of course there is hope, and you represent that hope in this piece. We read all the time in The Beat how the system is messing people's lives up (and we agree that it is), but seldom do we read about personal responsibility for being in the system to begin with. So we really appreciate this message. At the same time, we don't understand the Bible passage you quoted. What does it mean, "the leaves of the tree will heal Nations?"



Stop complaining about the system and get out of it. Get out of it by owning up to what you did and break the cycle of in and out, in and out.

Walking Out Of The Past And Into The Future

Today I got my order to release. I'm going to "out of home placement." I have 12 months to complete, not only to get out but to set my life straight. Over the time I have been here, I've been learning about the other things I can get in life. There's a lot more out there for me than what I've been makin' it.

I'm glad to hear that I only have a couple weeks left. This is an experience that I will never forget. It's not good to spend your teenage years incarcerated. But I'm makin' it good, because this was the key to setting my life straight. I was given a chance to free my soul and start my life anew.

Once released, I will look at this as the past, and I will get ready for my future. I'm happy now that I will be free.

-Cito B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We will really miss you in the workshops, CITO, but we are so happy for you, not just because you're out of here, but because you opened up your mind while you were in here. You didn't wait to start down a new path. You used your brain to see that a new path begins with a new attitude. We congratulate you! Just keep walking along that new road towards a better future. Good luck!

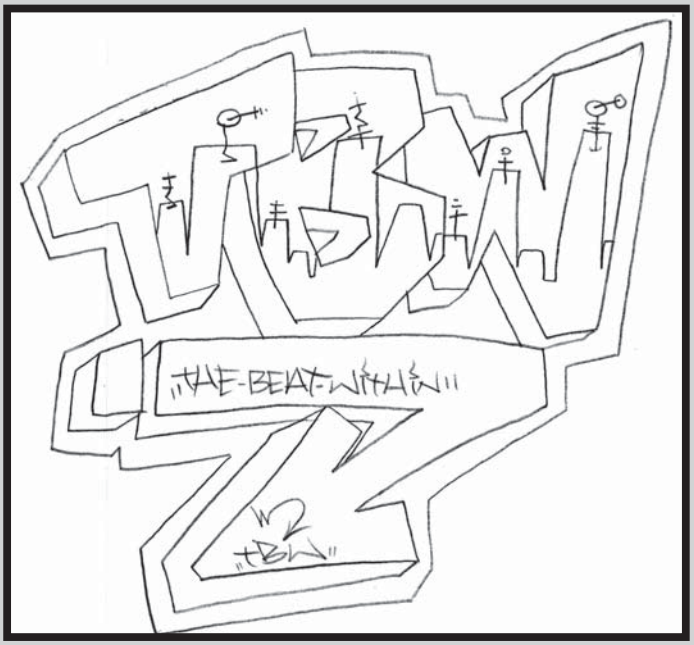
CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Bellelassrose

the most beautiful
in all the world
the lady of ladies
she is sweet
like no other
she will live up to her name
as i live up to mine
and i will be the person
to love my daughter
and i will be a dad
not just a father

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The distinction between "dad" and "father" is one of affection, being there to give directions with loving concern, not just to say yes and no but explain heart to heart why it is so, or just to stay silent and hold her hand, wipe away the tears and be the one to understand. You must build a stable life, live responsibly to stay free, work long hours to share those precious moments that will make you both glad you're not just her father but her dad.



Don't

Don't judge me
When you don't even know me
Don't send me to a place
That's only going to bring pain
Don't put me in a cage
With others
That care less and only want to harm me
And put me to rest
Don't make me look bad
When yet I'm misunderstood
Don't take me away from a child
That needs my love
But yet to receive it
Because of the treatment I have be given
Don't put me in a circle of people,
that might not make it
Don't do it for me
Do it for he or she
I can succeed in life
That I am tryin' to achive.

-Cooper, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Cooper, how do you see yourself? What kind of people would you place in your circle? If you want to suceed in life, make decisions that will help put you in a place that will help you.

To See Another Day

what make' me stronger is living every day
and staying alive to see another day
i know i am in jail but it will get better for me soon
but till then i will make things get better
what make' me stronger is waking up every morning
'cause some people don't wake up
what make' me stronger is to have food in my stomach
i know it ain't the right food to eat but it is better than nothing
what make' me stronger is waking me up every morning
because some people don't wake up 'cause god choose who
so peace out beat this yo' boy lil' sam and god bless everybody

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Stay strong, Lil' Sam, and offer God your thanks by praying for the strength to change the things you once did wrong for which you're now paying — and it may have nothing to do with the charge the DA is claiming. You are blessed already to find the strength to feel gratitude in this difficult time in which you so need to keep a positive attitude. Keep on staying strong.

Want Me Back

Hey how are you doing?

Me, I'm fine now that I'm over you. You know you really did hurt me really bad but you did not care. Now you wantin' me back and call me and call me. Can't you see that I'm done with you?

When you had me you did not want me; you say you did but you never showed me and still I was there for you.

You hit me. I went to jail for you and I did not even do the shhh!!! And shhh didn't give your name. I walk in on you in my house and in my bed with two other girls and I still stay with your sorry self!!

I really did love you but you did me wrong and I can't/won't do it anymore.

And now everyone is doing you wrong and leaving you alone 'cause they see what kind of dog you really are. And you think about me and how I was there for you and now you want me back—I think not.

I'm not mad at you anymore so I hope you have a good life, but you can't have me. Hahahahaha you can't have me!!!!

-Diamond D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Good for you! It always makes us really happy to hear about young women taking control of their lives and saying so long goodbye to abusive relationships—we just hope you stay strong and stay away from the fellow you addressed this piece to when you're back on the outs, and any other fool who can't show you the respect you deserve.

i know i am in jail
but it will get better for me soon
but till then i will make things get better
what make' me stronger
is waking up every morning
'cause some people don't wake up

The Words Of A Broken Heart

With all the pain and drama, with all the suffering from everything I go through. The feeling of every month, every week, every day, every hour, every minute, every second because of all the people coming in and out of my life. The people I get real close to or begin to really care about them. For then to come, leave and break my heart so bad.

People trying to say they my friend but really they is fake as hell... Of everyday life, I wake up thinking of the one love and the person I care about being stressed and confused. Watch people hurt me and each other. The cries of people. It's like, wow, so drama, so much things got to watch out for or you get shot, knifed, stabbed, burned, needle, electric shock, or just death.

-Doloris, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: We don't know your personal story, Doloris, but it must be heavy enough to make you so angry and stressed. We hope you're talking about these things with counselors (teachers? friends? family?), because we hear your cries among "the cries of the people." We can understand why you would go to drugs to medicate, but some of your feelings are probably because of those drugs. We hope PSK helps you to deal with the problems in a healthier way, but whether you do or not, the drama will still be there. That's why we hope you get the most out of this program, so that you will be better prepared to deal with the drama.

My Perfect Home

My perfect home would be going home to my father and living with him. Having my own room filled with Scooby Doo toys. My little brother would be there as well.

My mother would be out of the picture and everything would be fine and nothing to worry about anymore.

-Shalenn, Durango/Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: It sounds like you are close with your father and brother. It sounds like you are angry with your mother over some issues that may have happened in the past. Have you talked to your mother about these issues? What steps can you take to mend the relationship?

Up And On It

The person that keeps me up and on my shhh is my big sis Pooka. My big sis been through a lot, and most of the stuff I'm going through she been there. I think for a person to try and get you on the right track and give you the right advice to be there, they would have to have been through what you are goin' through.

When I'm ready to say forget everything, my big sis' is always the one I call and tell. She always there to tell me all the negative and positive things I would get out of a situation, and she don't care if it would hurt my feelings or not. My sis is always puttin' me on and makin' me stronger when I really need her. And I really respect her and trust her with my life. For real.

-Muck GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're lucky to have such a big sister, but you already know that. What we want to know, though, is how come you ended up in here when you have the support and wisdom of someone you respect who's already been through it? Did you just ignore her advice, or did she forget to give it to you?

I Like To Forget That My Best friend Died A Month Ago

Well I don't wanna ever forget him, I just wish that it never happened. A thing that I do wanna forget is that I have a cousin/brother, 'cause my mom married my auntie's x-boyfriend that had kids by my auntie. I wish they could just be my cousin 'cause ever since my mom got married things are falling apart.

-Adriqtce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That sounds like a hard situation to be caught in the midst of. Try to remember that your mother's actions aren't a reflection of you, and as difficult as it might be, you can try to keep your relationships with your cousin and auntie the same as ever. If they aren't able to do that yet they might change with time...good luck.

My Mind

People ask me, "What's going on with you? Why do you look that way? What are you thinking?" And I say nothing. I say nothing because I feel no one would understand.

See, my mind is like a maze. I try and figure it out day by day, but I wind up confusing myself. Being in this place clouds my mind. I can tell because I'm starting to feel hate and anger and I'm not that person. People ask me what's going on with me and I think to myself, "It's my mind. It's corrupted. It leads me to think negative, never to think positive.

And people ask me why do I look that way... because my mind is messed up, because I walk around with a fake-ass smile on my face knowing everything is not cool with me. And they ask, "What are you thinking?"

I'll tell you what I'm thinking: Why? Why can't this feeling go away, all this animosity all this hate? I'm not this person. People ask me why do I say nothing... because they will never understand that my mind is corrupted

-Yung C B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The fact that you are asking yourself why tells us that your mind is not as corrupted as you think it is. The truly corrupt mind doesn't question the negativity of his thoughts or deeds. You, on the other hand, recognize that something is happening inside your head that is not healthy. You may not be able to explain it to others, but you are trying to understand it for yourself, and that is already a very positive thing to do. You say feeling hate and anger is not you, but we have never known any person who has not felt hate and anger at some time. So, rather than denying it's you, we hope you can see that it's only a part of you and that as you deal with that part — trying to understand it and to manage it — you will automatically make other parts of you stronger, like your ability to think, to reason, to be self-aware and self-critical, to understand the world better and your place in it, and to express your thoughts and feelings. Even though you think you are saying nothing in answer to those inquiring questions, we think you are saying plenty! Keep thinking, and don't worry if the answers don't come right away. They will.

In Here

When you locked up in here, it ain't fun. All you think about is, "Damn why I had to get caught?" When you locked up, man, you just think about, "Why I can't be out there getting that dough? Or out there pimpin a hoe?" You locked up like a monster. They tell when to take a shower or time to wash up.

It ain't good when we get out. We brag and say, we not comin back, but about three weeks later - we back. We all get caught with a violation or get caught up for something else.

So, when you do get out, try to stay out man. We don't want to be locked up like an animal, it ain't no good. Rather than being here, you could be out there, goin' to school, playing football, do something with your time. You could be getting a scholarship or something.

-Maijji, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Maijji, you have a very good, point. But, if it's so easy, why do you think there aren't more people in school, playing sports, staying out of trouble in the first place? What will it take for people to learn their lesson? Did you learn yours? What's going to change in your life the day you walk out of the Hall?

Perfect home

A perfect home for me is with my family because without them I am nothing. If it was not for my mom or dad I would not be alive right now. Family is the number one thing for me and when there are no friends to talk to, there are my sisters to talk to at home. My perfect home is the one that is waiting for me right now.

-Sonia, Durango/Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Sometimes we don't know what we have until it is taken away from us. While you may not have appreciated your family before, it is obvious you do now. What will you do different this time when you are home? How can you show your family how you really feel?

I'de Rather Not Live With War So People Wont Die

I would rather fight for my hood then fight in a war because I don't know and I don't love everyone in America, but it's different with my hood 'cause I know and love everyone in it and I would protect anyone in my hood if I had to, that's the point of hanging in a hood; just in case you get into some trouble with a lot of people you know you got people to run to for help, and who won't let nothing happen to you.

-Adriqtce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There are a lot of different ways to take care of and support people—lifestyles that aren't so intertwined with violence. It's great that you feel safe and protected in your hood, but do you ever wonder why there's so much to be protected from?

Things Holding Me Back

Things that get in my way: The street, homeboys, peer resources, drugs and family problem. It feels like I can't break the force field. I'm trying to be mature, get a job and graduate high school and be successful, but it's so hard to get out of the streets and move on. If you don't call them they will call me, so there's no way avoid them 'cause they live in the same city That's why I am trying to make some money and move to another city to feel peace in my life.

-Weap B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We admire you for trying to "break the force field," as you describe it. And we wish we had some magic wand to wave that would make it happen. But, of course, we don't. That puts all the burden on your shoulders. Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is just say that very short word, "No," to people who expect things from you that you don't want to give. We hope you are able to move, but if you're not, we hope you are able to find the inner strength to stand up for yourself. If you were able to convey your hopes for a peaceful life, do you think your homies would respect your choice?

You Got to be Strong

What's making me stronger is my family, meaning friends too. I am stronger by the day, 'cause I've been to hell and back. And if you're really thought about what I said, you got to be strong to come back from Hell, meaning the worst situations ever. So that's what makes me stronger.

What is that hell? Hell is the life we live in today.

-Fresh, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We gave this piece extra props even though it's so short, because you squeeze a serious message into these few lines, and too many Beat writers and readers have felt this hell you call daily life. But now break it down for us, tell us about what you've done, seen, learned in this hell, and how you feel you got out of it, or how you plan to get out of it. Hell has a door right? If there's a way in, there's a way out. Especially when you use your strength.

What It Gon' Be

they say twenty-five
ninjas gon' ride
but what's gon' happen
when i say good bye
is i reppin' it right
they sayin' free travis
but i ain't hearin' it right
instead all i'm hearin' is
the judge yellin' twenty-five to life
shhh they hit on the dice
i'm in court lookin' for family
but ain't none in sight
man this can't be right
back on the van to j h
hatin' the sight
where i see all my ninjas
cold starin' postin' nikes
throwin' up the turf
in for life and ain't no cure
as i jump off the van
holdin' my nuts
what's wrong wit' you
i can't get touched
on my way down to max
keep it gutter
man it just the fact
it's still all butter
i know my moms gone
but tell my sista i love her
mad at the whole world
but keep it gangsta like danny glover
ridin' like baby bubba
holdin' my weed like my lover
i'm a bad son of a mother

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We couldn't print your first verse at all, but here's verse two with a couple of small changes. We know reppin' your gang by name and tossing out threats of violence is regular hood talk, but as such it's part of the game we blame for your current incarceration, not to mention the premature deaths of so many youngsters published in our pages. What's left of your lyric is still a taste of what's real, but we want to see you rise above the game's appeal and rep' a whole other way to show nerves of steel. You've got the heart of a lion, but don't encourage more to follow the road illin', killin' and dyin'.

Life After The Hall

life after the hall which means i can stand tall
in two weeks i will be able to go home and hit the mall
what's been on my mind is my daughter
from me doing something stupid to something smarter
now that she's in my life that's all that matter
i'll love now and later don't mean to flatter
got god on my side to help me with my pride
so straight for the sun i will ride
camp is what i wanted it to be
go to school all day and go home at the end of the week
the love i have for my family, you can call me weak
unable to touch my family, that's not sweet
me meeting new friends that's hard to see
most of them are in your face for something and others are you enemies
just being in this hot weather makes me weak
life after the hall, ain't it sweet

-Mos Def, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Fools may call you weak 'cause you know family life is sweet, but it takes more strength to show up everyday and do right for your loved ones than it does to hit the spot strapping a gun acting like you're the boldest one — more courage and more self-confidence, too. Camp is not the best place to make new friends, too many foo's; but the way we see it, you're doing way past coo'!

Coming to Camp Sweeney?

What's up, Beat? I'm writing you again from Camp. This is to those who are coming up to Camp. I'm go' game y'all up!

When y'all come here, stay to yourself. These dudes are not solid. Stay wit' yo' real people on the outs, 'cause these dudes just trying to eat off you. And don't talk while talking is dead, because that's the easiest way to get a write-up. And don't argue with staff, 'cause you get an incident [report].

Basically, just stay to yourself, keep yo' mouth shut, and just be you — and do your program so you can get your home visit and go see your family! And when you do, don't go to the 'hood on your first HV. Go kick it with your family. Keep it solid.

-Lil' D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Not only is this very good advice, but it says a lot for just how clear your thinking has become. But now, don't let your clear thinking stop with your time at Camp. Use the same wisdom after your released so that you never have to come back!

RIP Mikal

What you feeling? This Derrick. Tonight I choose to write about my bra.

I remember when I was just going dumb for ya' graduation from 8th grade in June. We was doing it live, with Fanisha and Danisha, you know the twins. I was with you the night you left. You remember, we was gon' get them new gold ones, we ordered.

I miss you man. I feel bad, ya' mom was going crazy, crying in that hot July day. When you left the whole school shed tears and came to the funeral. We went dumb the night of your home-going celebration.

God took you at a young age. I'm gon' see you when I come up there. I love you. I need you to look out for me and guide me.

-Derrick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Derrick, it hurts when one of our loved ones pass, especially at such a young age. Life is precious. Look out for your life; make smart decisions. Peace – RIP Mikal.

My Son

I want to go home because I want to see my son. My son is six months old and a very good kid. I hope he doesn't grow up to be like me, going to juvenile hall and getting into trouble, like I do.

If I have anything to do with my son, he will never see the inside of these walls. I am only 16; I had my son when I was 15. I'm not going to say my son was a mistake, but I'm going to say that it was something that wasn't planned to happen when it happened. I have my son and would never disown him for anything or anyone.

When I get out of I'm going to try to do things right and I will never have to come back, so I could take care of my son and he will not grow up thinking that it's ok to get caught up in the System.

My son's name is Mario. I named him after my older brother who was killed in 2001. I pray to God that I never have to come back to this place so I could be a good influence on my son's life.

-Park, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Park, we know that you are serious about change. We can hear it in your words. Do you know how to keep yourself out of trouble? Don't be afraid to ask for help. Find someone you can trust and learn from. Your son is six months old. Everything you do affects this child's life. Set a good example – turn your life around. You can do it! Do it for him; Do it for you!

I'm Out

pretty soon i'm gone
i hope i do good at home
get a job let my mix tape drop and move on
i need to stay away from drugs
stay away from thugs
take care of my lil' brothers and help out my mom
pass my test and get in college
work on my skills and my product
i'll be droppin' on my c d's like bush needs to drop from office
i wish everyone good luck
to get out and not mess up
so the county can't make money on account of us being stuck
well ... i'm out soon and i gotta do good
from now on it's music and family fo' me, so forget the 'hood

-Buddamilk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Major props on doing that good program, getting your head right so you're ready to move on to better things. You've always shown talent in your lyrics and great courage in your spirit, and we wish you all the best. Much love and respect to you and your family.

Life – In and Out

Life in and out of jail is something else, because you can think about what you did wrong, but most of the time you think of how you can do better to stay out. All I do is think of my family. And all the people that are gone.

I've been in jail a lot and I'm still young. I don't talk a lot like the others, I just be cool and listen. I always was told the hard people never tell people they're hard. You just look and listen. I'm going to CYA soon and can't stop thinking about my life and what I did.

I have people out there that need my help, but I can't help them. I wish I could, but I have to do all this time. I am workin' out and playin' a lot of ball in here.

To all the people that's in jail, but they're going to get out soon, don't come back! Because you're just letting your life go by. And you can't do nothing to stop it. Is five hundred dollars and a new car worth three years in a new cell – or old one?

Keep it lit, but keep it lit on the outs.

-Kush, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Kush, you're on the right track if you are looking back at your life, re-evaluating what you've done. What will the next few years of your life bring you? Do you know how you will behave? If freedom is going to be the first thing on your list of priorities, will you be able to think clearly and not act impulsively? Be prepared. Life will test you. Are you hard enough to hold on to what's most important?

RIP Jaee

What's good Beat? This Derrick I'm alright.

RIP to my boy Jaee, I miss you bra.

In June we was on the Freemont football team, knocking boys on the field down hard. We was going to Oakland Tech, then you left me. We gon' do the fool and go bananas on girls. I need your guidance pimp, stay strong with the Lord.

-Derrick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Rest in peace Jaee.

In My Way

Things that get in my way is when I am trying to do my thing and these ninjas want to fight me. I can control that, but not in a good way. I don't want to do it in a bad way, but if I have to I will.

So, that's one of the things that I don't like. That gets in my way, but in Hayward, that happens a lot. So, I have no control of what goes on at all. I really have no control over nothing in life 'cause there is no telling what going to happen; these days or the next.

-Lil' T, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have a lot more control than you think, Lil' T. You are responsible for your actions. When others want to fight you, you should defend yourself. But, is there anyway to keep yourself out of these compromising situations? There will be many, many things that will get in your way. As you experience life, the real test will be, how you handle those obstacles.

Government In My Way

The government is standing in my way. It stays busting this ninja for shhh I ain't even do! The justice system has got too many flaws and cracks not worked out. They got the economics worked out for their own benefit but not the justice side of things. A ninja don't get a fair chance to succeed.

-Lavaedra, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes there's nothing to do but accept that the playing field is not level, but what you choose to do with that fact is crucial. Step outside the law to try to get an edge back, and the system will pursue you, use you and abuse you, for a fact. Or do it legally, knowing you'll have to work twice as hard as the next man both to succeed and stay free. Then help change the rules for the next generation so they won't face (unjust) incarceration.

Why?

Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
Abuse our body, like it's not a temple
Date young men, old men, that don't care anything about us
Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
Disrespect the mother
And we don't go to school
But we think its cool
Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
Hanging on the coner sellin' dope
And some of us don't have no where to go
Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
And we call ourselves prostitutes
Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
Babies having babies
And the daddy is no where to be found
Why is it that us young women act the way we do?
Maybe you could ask yourself that question
Cause I do know where I'm going in life
So how about you?

-Spunkie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Spunkie, why do you do what you do? Why have you done what you've done? How do you know that you can change your life around? So many questions... Any answers? Great writing!

Blessed?

I am blessed
Yes I am
Because God gave me the gift to carry a child
That I never thought I could have
But see, I thought wrong
So now, I have to do right
See, I almost lost my baby
But God was with me.
So to all you mothers and fathers
Do right, love your child
And never leave them out.
God bless you all.

-Spunkie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Spunkie, you're going to be a mama! A beautiful baby is going to be looking up to you. You are going to influence this child for the rest of her/his life. You have been blessed! Spunkie, maybe it's time to put aside a little spunk and plan your life according to what's best for your child. We know you're gonna be a great mom. Just remember your priorites and watch that impulse control. Good luck!

Fly On The Wall

I would like to be in the room when my boyfriend talks about me to hear what he says about me, and to hear the thoughts that go through his head. I would also want to be there when friends talk about me to know if they talk good or bad. That's when I wish I was invisible – to hear what people close to me say about me.

-Nancy, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Thanks Nancy. This piece is real. Most of wouldn't admit it, but most of us wonder how we are thought of by others.

My Grandma

In the way of me doing good are not just the street, but in me. I can change myself and maybe the streets but it all starts within.

What makes me stronger is my grandma. She gives me good and bad, but it makes me better inside when things don't make sense. She does something to make me understand by all the bad things I done effects her. Seein' how she hurts because of what I do makes me want change for the better

-Lil' T, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Seeing that pain on a loved one's face - grandma, son, mother, sister, brother – is the thing that makes us remember the thing we most often forget: We matter in this world. You matter. You're important to someone. Thanks for a short but heartfelt piece reminding us all of how much of a difference that love makes.

What I'd Like To Forget

Sometimes what I like to forget is my life sometimes
'cause there is some good things and some bad things,
like some of the men that hurt me
'cause sometimes I think about it
and sometimes it hurts me really
Really bad and some night I ask God
Please let me get to sleep and stop thinking about that stuff.
And sometimes I like to think about it so I know
What to look for in people and men
When I find one
you know, so it kinda helps me too
so I really don't know 'cause my life is crazy.

-Diamond D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Night-time is sometimes the hardest when we have heavy things weighing on our minds. Like you said, it's good to think things through, but try not to let it drive you crazy.

Positive Motivation

Positive motivation,
For Gods creation
I have a good reaction.
I wanna change
I want my life rearranged
I want a positive motivation
I want to be strong
Our mistakes were wrong
But I got to face the many things I have to admit
But yet they won't come out
All the bad things that are deep within
The line that I'm on, is real thin
But I'm looking on the bright side
Cause I have positive motivation
I have many dreams
But not all will come true
Things are in the way
Things that are in my mind
Saying, should you go or stay?
But now, the only thing that's in the way
Is the answer
You tell me what it is
What did I miss?
Positive motivation!

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You tell us Tabatha. Where do you find your positive motivation? Think about the rewards of living a positive life – that should give you the motivation. It's hard to get your life on the right path, but trust us, it will be worth it!

Now I See

Regardless the way I am treated or the way people try to hurt me or abuse my mind saying things that are not true, I will always overpower my emotions and my mind and let myself know that I have gone too far towards success to be led towards failure. The truth lies inside my heart. I see what is meant for me to see.

-Cito B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We are so proud of you, CITO. You have come to understand some very profound truths that can only make your life much easier and more fulfilling. The truth does indeed lie inside your heart — and you have a very sweet heart. Thank you for all your contributions to The Beat.

A Quick Thought

Damn! I'm back again and I see myself asking why? Don't I have any good luck?

My dad had been killed years ago and I see my family members in and out of jail. Almost like it's a cycle. My mom is struggling something tough, and I can't really do too much to help.

Sometimes I feel like I'm bad luck.

If you ask me why, it's because it seems like everyone who comes around me ends up with a problem or problems.

My future husband just went down for something that's eating me alive. Deep down inside I believe it's my fault. That's when I come to mind and say why don't I have any good luck? But the truth is it's not my fault and I have had good luck all along because if I never had bad luck good luck wouldn't be. So I've learned to just relax and be patient because what's going to be is what's going to be.

-Lil' Lady Relle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Try to remember that people's problems almost always belong to them—it doesn't do any good to blame your self for other people's hardships. You're absolutely right that it's not your fault. Hang in there.

The Game

I love you for many reasons, I hate you for even more.

You messed with my mind and my stability. You told me lies and I gave myself to you willingly. Why would you hurt me me? You acted like you loved me with all your money, clothes, cars and gold. I thought that was love, but I guess you fooled me.

The beginning was good, the middle even better, but the end was the worst stage ever. You said you would be there.

My mother tried to warn me. I was a young girl, screaming for love, daddy wasn't there so I ran to you. I hate that you don't know what I go through. The dreams and the nightmares. One day I will be bigger than you.

-Shamaya, Durango/Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: That was truly a powerful piece of writing. It sounds like you were hurt pretty bad by someone you cared about and thought cared about you. It is important in the future to be surrounded by positive people and people who want you to grow and will support you. It sounds like this experience taught you not to give your heart away so fast or to someone who doesn't deserve it.

RIP Mike

I remember me and all my potnas going to Eastmont Mall studio and seen my patnas rapping hella clean shhh.
I remember when my ninja Mike was beating theseother ninjas asses at a time.
I remember my ninja Mike was solid,
I remember my bra stayed sellin' some and saying' bra, mess wit' me and help me sell some shhh.
I remember that ninja sell anything from CDs to DVDs

-Curtis, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Mike's skills as a rapper and the smarts in his head were legendary around town. He will be missed – he was always pushing and struggling to get out of this life, and then he became a casualty. He's gone, but you're still here, and now it's on you to continue that struggle, to rise above? The Beat supports you no matter what, but we do hope that you choose a path that will honor all his hopes and dreams. Peace

Not Going Home

Thought I was goin' home but psych on me
When I went to court I could tell the judge would hate on me
When I asked him why I am being detained he said it is for my own good
But he doesn't even know me a little bit to tell me what is good.
So I have another month just need to hold on
Being locked up on my birthday isnt really much fun
Misunderstood the contract so I didn't sign,
Now everyone thinks I have a messed up mind

-Tremayne, Durango/Maricopa County Arizona

From The Beat: It's always disappointing when you are expecting something to happen and it does not. In this case you were expecting to go home. Although you will be locked up on your birthday, hopefully this will be the last time you are detained. What have you learned so that in the future you can make better choices? Thank you for expressing your feelings with us. We hope you don't have to write about being detained and disappointed again.

Pain

Pain - what is pain?
Is it the feeling that you feel when you know you wanna cry?
What is pain?
Is it the feeling that you feel when you get hit or
Is it the feeling you feel when you lose a loved one?
What is pain?
Is it the feeling that you feel when you're alone and abandoned?
What is pain?
Is it the pain that I feel everyday that I'm away from home or
Is it the feeling that you get when you know you did wrong?
For real what is pain 'cause I wanna know.

-Lean, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Pain comes in all shapes and sizes and can strike us at any time. There are people who live for it and there are people who spend their whole loves running from it. Some pretend it's not there, even when it is, and some swim in it, revel in it, because they think it is the only thing they will ever know. We cannot let our emotions control us and we cannot pretend they aren't there. We can't tell you what pain is but we believe when you feel it, you know it.

In The Way

Being easily influenced I think that's what stands in my way.
Every time I try to do the right thing it always ends up being the wrong thing.
I think that my turf is in the way 'cause all I think about is being on the street
standing right in front of the store with everybody else.
I don't never want to do nothing but get money to go to the mall.
When I used to go to school I would leave early and go right back to hood.
And do the same thing over again.
So I think my turf sometimes stand in the way.

-Daynisha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The influence of friends and loved ones is usually the hardest to combat—it can feel like wanting a different kind of life is in some way a betrayal. But it's important to remember that we can do much more for the people and places we love by finding and cultivating the positive and strong parts of ourselves.

Our Beautiful Relationship

When I was younger I dreamed how my relationship would be a sharing of goals and lives. A love so strong that it is always exciting and growing, a blending of to imperfect individuals into stronger better people who laugh more, accomplish more, are happier, more successful and more at peace. My dream came to be because you had the same dream as I and I want you to always know how thankful I am for our beautiful relationship and how much I love you. To my wifey Lala.

-G-Money, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lucky you are, to share a dream with someone!

My Soul

Sometimes
When I feel like I'm goin' to fall apart
I hold my ribs, all the way around,
Both sides.
My ribs hold me together,
Like glue
They keep my breath close to my heartbeat
They keep my soul from escaping and
Leaving me grounded.
I hold brightness and shadows in
The hollow where my ribs meet
I hold then there in the memories
Of slow, sorrowful music and
Porch steps.
I hold my ribs, until I feel solid
Until my legs are tree trunks and fingers are fruit.
One love to my cousin JT still writing poems to these girls out there so for all
y'all girl out there don't stop reading. I love you JT !

G-Money, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for stepping up and writing about how to love and care for yourself, not just about loving the ladies!

What Make Me Stronger Is My Loved Ones

A lot of things make me stronger like my family showing me support, just like my homies do; it means a lot to have people talking to me and showing that they have love and care for me. But sometimes just looking at my loved ones also make me stronger because I know that they are there to back me up or to help me make different decisions.

The person that is helping me move to a positive future is my girlfriend because she's always there for me and I feel her love give me a lot of strength.

-Dark, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Well it sounds like you know just how lucky you are because there are a whole lot of folks who need someone on their side. Use the love and support that your family gives you to help keep you on track – remember that they are fighting for you because they love you and want the best for you. It's about time that you started wanting those things for yourself cause their love alone cannot save you.

Love

Love is lust
So what are we?
You say you love me
But you don't ever show me
If yo' way is by buying me clothes
And given me doe
Then that aint love
That's lust
You say you trust me
But yet when I'm gone
For more than five minutes
You always abuse me
But then again
You say you love me
Yeah, you keep me in the best Bebe
Expess, Vonduch and above
Cause every thing I rock, every body know it's the best
Yeah, you got me riding on a clean whip
Seating high on 22's
And I can't complain
But all those things can't buy me love
What happen to the good times
When you use to ask me what was wrong
We use to sit up all night and talk about life
You use to rub me down with coca butter
And tell me everything's going to be alright
But then all that changed
Once you got caught up in the Game
So now, your way of lovin' me
Is cherishing me with all these materialistic things
That don't mean nothing
And it at no game
And I wish you was here
To feel my pain
So tell me
Do you love me? Or is it lust?
Because if your way to cherish me is materialistically
Then it's not love, its lust.

-Kamesha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: How do you show your love to this special someone? What would happen to the relationship if there was no money to spoil you materialistically? What's your role in this situation?

Alone

Drain the blood from my veins but my
heart still beat with pain,
cold, shiver, arm hug chest, sleep,
dream,
nightmare scream, eyes open,
who wipe your sweat
who wipes your tears.
Who holds you
hushes your inner cries
no-one alone
scared
deal with it alone,
strong, weak, think, who said you can't
be both?
The light will come but will cast
shadows.
Give in give up never fight
be strong
and move on.

-Jezebel, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Oh Jezebel, you deliver a powerful poem here that only makes us wonder about the type of pain you have. Is there anyone in your life who has helped you get through this period? Is there someone to talk to? What are you doing to better your life? Writing is a great first step, what about talking? Who can you talk to?

Do you love me? Or is it lust?

Because if your way to cherish me is materialistically Then it's not love, its lust

Stronger

What makes me stronger? Well really I don't know what makes me stronger. I mean I think my faith and knowing that I have a good man by my side and his being really someone that really cares about me. He also said, before I got caught up with the PO, that I should handle what I have to do not only that, but everyone of his family including mine said "He's a really good guy." He supports my dreams and my goals and my accomplishments.

When I was about to do something bad he would always tell me, "why you doing all these bad things? Why don't you think about the things that you're doing get a job go to school and make something out of your life." But yeah, I believe my man, and my little cousins and friend keep me strong and my head up high.

-Fijian Tongan Queen, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's great to hear that you have a supportive relationship to help you through the tough times and keep you strong. Has your experience in the halls this time made you any more ready to heed your boyfriend's advice the next time around? We hope so and wish you luck.

This Life Ain't Cool

get my money up, i'm in the town at night
a hundred murders, people dying left to right
but this is oakland, getting popped 'cause you shoot the dice
now you got caught, and now you doing twenty-five to life
life ain't cool if you doing all that
step yo' game up, and don't let it fall back
youngsters getting pop' 'cause you disrespected the block
or you at his spot and you served his knock
now they gon' trip 'cause you taking his money
bundle in the cutty's and this shhh get ugly
now you got popped and your face all bloody

-Lil' T, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've got to get off the street and get yourself a j-o-b to make your money and stay free, not just free from the system but free from the high-risk consequences that you face in a life that's all about takin' and no givin'. You disrespect yourself if you stay in that life chasing temporary wealth when you know it's bad for your health. A hundred killed, still counting, as the fatalities keep mounting — the streets of Oakland are safe for no one on the grind 'cause someone with a gun straight out his mind.

This Is My Life

I find myself in the way. And my group of friends. It's so hard to just drop some of your patnas when they've been there for you fought for you and gone to jail for you. But yet as bad as you and your patna are doin' we always find each other talking about doin' better.

Some of the things that bring me down is not having someone to encourage me to bring me up but that's one of my mountains is needing someone to help bring me up instead of just having hope.

Tupac is the most inspiring person in my life beside Jesus. I've been listening to Tupac since I was a tot, I've always loved him. What he said in his lyrics refers to a lot in my life.

-David, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Why is it so much easier to talk about doin' good than to do it? We've all experienced it – not just you – but maybe you can share your wisdom with us next time you write!

Life Has To Go On, RIP Cell

Walkin' in this lil' hell we call Oakland ain't easy, as for me and my squad and his family and others that new of him, this just makes life a lil' harder so many mixed feelings sometimes it's hard to focus. It's hard to control these feelings in the right way. I want to make a smart choice but the only way I know how to make some of this pain go away is revenge but then again I ask myself is this really gonna help or is it gonna just cause more pain?

Damn I want answers. Please God help us to receive a better understandin' I'm learning more and more as the days go by, but I still can't understand why I still really don't want to accept his death. I miss my ninja so much but I know in my heart that he is in a better place. I know he is watchin' over us all. I know my ninja is resting in peace but then again I wish it all was just a big dream. Someone please throw some hot grease on me and wake me up. I don't care if half of my face gets burned I just want Cell to walk this earth again as a human being. I miss my ninja. It wasn't his time to go. He was to young to die. RIP Cell. We all miss you bra 'till I see you at them gates.

-Lil' Naudie Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Keep praying for help and you'll find it within yourself. Praying will keep you strong and focused. You know what to do, you've said it in many pieces you've written for The Beat. We're so proud of how much work you've done inside yourself and how open you are about your grief. But please know that grief is something that stays with us forever when we lose someone. It changes, and loses its sharp intensity, but it never goes away. So instead of trying to make the pain end, surrender to it and let the grief help you make better decisions about your own precious life.

My Pain

Blood sucking through my vain
I maintain
The pain
That lives within
My life line is thin
Its hidden in a bin
What life do I have to live for
My heart is torn
With the bull horns
The shear of tea
With God I fear
This cell is Hell
I have not fell
Who can not tell
All the cries
That do not try
To come out in my mind
I shout
Can't pout
Nails digging into my skin
Thick blood
But mad within
With all these staff
I have to go through a path
To get to my door
All these tears pour
I fall to the fall
For not, I stand tall
Give it a chance
Throw the ball
Anger don't be a stranger
My skin is white
My feelings is tight
I bite
With anger
The vain
With the pain
That I maintain
That lives inside me
My pain.

-Tabatha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Tabatha, your pain comes in the form of a rhyme, which doesn't sound like such a bad time. We know that you feel pain – and many others have been through the same. Don't worry, if you believe, you can achieve. And what about all the things to smile about?

What's Life Worth?

Life is worth everything. Even when things have gone so bad you think there is no point in living. But sometimes it happens for the best of it. You learn from what you did and you start to see the world a little more. You start to realize what's wrong from right. Some people learn from it. They have succeeded and have lived well.

-Juan, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We think you may be describing your own healthy reaction to the missteps you've made. You're heading in the right direction.

What's In The Way

What's in the way is weed and all those good things in it. Another thing in my way is the system 'cause it's a set up to me. And my family is in way 'cause I choose to run with them when they go on one or go dumb or smoke some purple 'cause the reason I smoke is 'cause I be stressing

-Lil' T, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What an honest list of things in the way. Now that you've identified the problems, can you dream up some solutions? What will stop you from stressing?

Which One Will You Chose?

Which life will you choose?
The one that most people have chosen, or the one that forces you to hustle all night long? The one that causes you to look over your back for the rest of your life
if someone shoots you?
Pray to God that it won't hit you
or are you the one that doesn't give an eff if the bullet hits you or not?
Do you want to be the one spending over a hundred days in a locked down institution
where you have to wear underwear with stains in them or socks with holes
or do you want to lay on a fake ass bed with graffiti on it?
Do you want to be in a room for most of the day and look at the walls and smell the smell of dried up cum and spit?
Do you want to get out of jail and some back within two months and keep comin' back
until you get washed and thrown in a cage?
Do you want to have to worry about gettin' killed over revenge
'cause they comin' for ya
Do you want to be the one that someone reads about in the paper?
Damn, ain't this about a messed up life, that most of us have chosen, but why?
Why have we allowed ourselves to fall into the trap?
If you really look at it, it really is a trap and we're the only dumasses to fall into it. Why?! Is it because of the fast like-an-OPD-taz-car money?
Are we tryin' to prove ourselves to somebody
'cause the only one we are really provin' ourselves to is the devil.
Is it because we want to just do what we want to?
There are so many good things to list from this life of sin
but at the same time it is only a few bad things to list damn ain't that a trip.
So many good things but only a few bad things
that right there should tell us something.
We can see our closest friend die and then the next week we'll be on the block
spittin' out rocks. We ain't even fallin' in the trap
we're layin' down in the trap and the ones that have set the traps are sittin' back
laughin' at our dumasses. And not only them but the devil too.
Why must we choose this life?
Why is it so hard for us to just say "I'm through with this shhh!"
We ain't doin' nothin' but hurtin' ourselves.
All this killing needs to come to a stop.
It has been over 95 killings in Oakland and one of my close friends was the 18th homicide of this year and he also lived the life we have chosen
we miss our bra so much and in his memory I would like to turn my life around
for the better.
May God rest your soul.
Rest in peace Marcellus Halley
For those that still have a chance in life and that is doin' bad,
now is the time to change but you know now I feel right now.
So again I ask which one will you choose the life of destruction or the life of everlasting? Which one will you chose?

-Lil' Naudie Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Naudie Bo you've worked through so much of your anger and grief on the pages of The Beat and we are so impressed with you but watch out because your words seem like you are about to fall into the trap you're warning your homies about. You can't have it all. You can't bring Cell back, so learn from his loss and move on! Your freedom is what you want, minus the paranoia and the negative lifestyle that comes from the streets. It's not worth it! Don't lay down in further trap. Walk free with your head held high. Do your program. Move on with your life youngsta, you have a ton of potential!

Freedom

Freedom is everything.
Free means getting money not by selling drugs or robbing people
but by doing the right thing, like getting a job.
Right now I'm too young to get a job.
Getting in trouble stands in my way.
I've been getting in trouble with my friends too much.
But I hope and pray that I'll leave this place one day.
When I get out I'm gonna finish school and go to college.
I'm gonna do it by quittin' getting in trouble,
quit hangin' out with friends.
I'm gonna have good friends and quit robbin' people. And stop selling drugs.

-Marquis, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your ambition is very impressive, Marquis! We know that it's not easy to change your ways, and that the pressure around you to do things that aren't good for you is very strong. We hope you come to The Beat for support as you make these big changes!

It's What I Needed

I would always drive past the juvenile hall and think: those kids must be bad to be there. I never thought I would be in there. When I got caught for something in February, I had to spend the night there. I hated it. I thought I would never go back. I didn't want to. But over the summer I messed up and had to come back. At first I didn't really like it. After a little time, I realize it is what I needed.

-Robert, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Spoken like a young man who has learned a lesson. We hope our impression is right. What must you do to stay out of juvenile?

It has been over 95 killings in Oakland and one of my close friends was the 18th homicide of this year and he also lived the life we have chosen

How To Cope

When things are all wrong
it's hard to get along.
But this little white paper
keeps me staying strong.
Being a chola nowadays
is like the game my son plays –
a never ending circle of hatred and pain.
I used to just watch blood drip from my vein.
But now I have learned how to cope.
So, all my young soldiers, there is still hope.
All of your stories keep me going
and even though fighting court is annoying,
stand tall!

-Lil' Casper, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We'll give you as much white paper as you can fill. Keep writing. Writing and talking are the best ways to let out your frustrations and your concerns. That's why we're here with The Beat.

This Love Thing

Love makes me stronger...
My love is my backbone.
Keeps my heart pumping...
Keeps me standing strong as one man.
My love motivates me...
Mind body and soul belongs to love.
I love my love...
I'm dedicated to love, addicted to love...
'cause love is addicted to me...
There's no rehabilitation for this addiction,
I wouldn't want it if there was one.
Love satisfy my whole mood...
And it will always and forever,
Until the day I die.

-Biggie Littles, LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: To have love is important. We all want to be loved and you are so lucky to have just that, love.

My Thoughts

The things that make me stronger are my thoughts.
When I'm alone I wonder to myself who am I really?
Then a whole bunch of other things come to mind and it helps me cry and wonder why
I come up with the reason and I strongly believe that makes me strong
it helps me find myself.
Basically, talking to myself
before speaking to anyone first makes me think and I gradually become stronger.

-Clemelle, 150 Crew

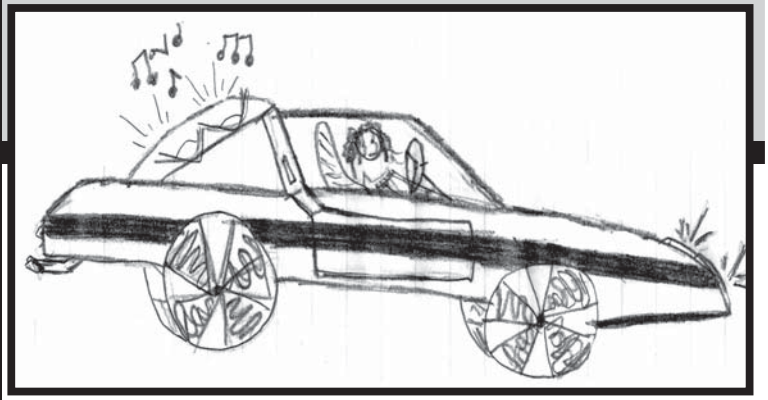
From The Beat: Wow, that's the truth. Really exploring ourselves and our souls is such an important part of personal growth, and can reveal a lot about the way we interact with the world. We're so glad for you that you know your own strength and we know that you'll take good care of yourself.

Strong

I am strong
But that don't mean I'm alone
What would you do
To make yo' dreams come true
I want to get rich
But not quick
'Cause that don't last
So I'm gonna leave that in the past
You said you had this
And you said you had that
And now you locked up
And you can't get that back.

-Danielle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice writing Danielle! Beautifully said.



Living

Living in life, all stressed out
What is this all about
Living in a world of prostitution
It should in a constitution
Living with my red hair
I need my teddy bear
Living in life all confused
Because I have been abused
Living in life under the instruction
The instruction of the prosecution
Living in life with my pimp
Is what put me here.

-Dennise, Duragno/Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Great expression and honesty. It sounds like you have had a really rough start. Although detention is hard, do you agree that this is a safer place for you? Living on the streets is very dangerous and most girls end up hurt or dead. You have been given a chance to get away from that lifestyle and lead a safe and happy life with people who really do care about you. You deserve to be treated with respect but you have to respect yourself first. Do you respect yourself enough to want a better life and do what it takes to achieve this?

Make the right moves to be successful in life, you don't wanna be a bum on the streets later in life

Your Smile Can Reappear Just As Easily

What's up wit' The Beat? What makes my smile disappear is first, you havin' a good time, then you hear about somethin' wrong happenin' to one of our loved ones—that's when you start thinkin' like man, it's all wrong. But then, again, just like how a smile can disappear, it can reappear just that easy.

Sooner or later you gonna find somethin' to do that's just gonna make you smile permanently, for the simple fact you know you're doin' somethin' good for yourself and others.

-Young Jeff, Marin

From The Beat: Nice effort! What will bring yoru smile back? What are you gonna do to stay out of juvenile? Tell us your plans!

Speaking From The Heart

Time is running out
I'm speaking from the heart
Time is running out
It's time to make a start
Time is running out
It's time for court
It's time to get out

To all the people that is locked up: It's time to make a change, time is running out. Make the right moves to be successful in life, you don't wanna be a bum on the streets later in life. So make that change and God be with you!

-Joshie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We can see from the way you say this -- from the heart -- that at some point someone you respect must have said it to you. Who was it? And what do you think it would take to make that change? When you plan out your future, what kinds of steps do you think you'll need to take to make to turn your life around? If you have a plan, share it with The Beat in your next piece!

Unhappy New Year (Part 2)

Well I'm back y'all -- let me begin.

Well when I got home on the day my Momma died, and I seen all my family was at my front porch. Then I was asking all my uncles what happened, and they told me that my momma had died.

I started to cry. Then they told me everything was going to be OK, and I really couldn't believe that my momma died. I cried the whole night until the funeral two weeks later.

(to be continued.)

-Lil' Ronnie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It takes a lot of courage and heart to put down your darkest day on paper. We feel drawn into the story and we're looking forward to the next installment. Who was it that comforted you the most on that day? Was it one of your uncles? Did you have brothers and sisters also going through it? What was the biggest change that took place in your life after this tragedy? Keep writing, and we'll keep reading!

Cold Bar-B-Que

This staff ain't cool -- sittin' here in Juvenile Hall in max, smellin' some good ass popcorn I can't eat. I feel like snatchin' that popcorn and slammin' it by myself. We eat dog food and they eat regular food. Because we detainees, we can't eat what they eat.

When I get out, I'm gon' rent a truck, drive it out to Juvenile Hall, and bar-B-Q out the back of the truck. When staff come out and ask can I buy some, I'm gon' say "For detainees only!"

-Lil' Rony, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say that revenge is a dish best served cold (which is why we picked that title). Though we'd never advocate any kind of revenge-taking in these pages, we have to say that the creativity of your idea knocked us off our feet. That kind of long term thinking, and sense of humor, is exactly what will keep you calm and get you through your tests to come. You don't need to mess up, you have too many smart ideas for success!

Loss

My time is up not in the ranch but life
Why did it take this much time
To tell me I had a son that did not
Make it in this world
No words can express what I'm feeling
The only one that comes to mind
Is screw the world!

My time is up and I don't give a....
If I go nothing can stop me
What my mind is set on
It's only a matter of time until I
Get out..

-G, LCRS

From The Beat: We are so sorry for the loss of your baby. Now is the time not to bottle anything up. Now is the time to talk to staff, a counselor, psych, anyone that you trust. Loss is hard. WE wish you the best in getting through this period. We hope your family is supportive and helps you succeed once you find freedom

Even though the police be messin' wit' ninjas for no reason, if I don't give them a reason to jump on a ninja, then they couldn't really mess with me. ...

In My Own Way

Sometimes I get in my own way.

I'll get out of jail and swear that I ain't comin' back, I'll have a plan to do something good, like get a job and chill out wit' my baby Mama, and raise my son.

The first couple of days I'll be good. But then I'll go back to the hood and start hanging out with' the same ass ninjas and doin' the same ass shhh, like robbin' and selling drugs.

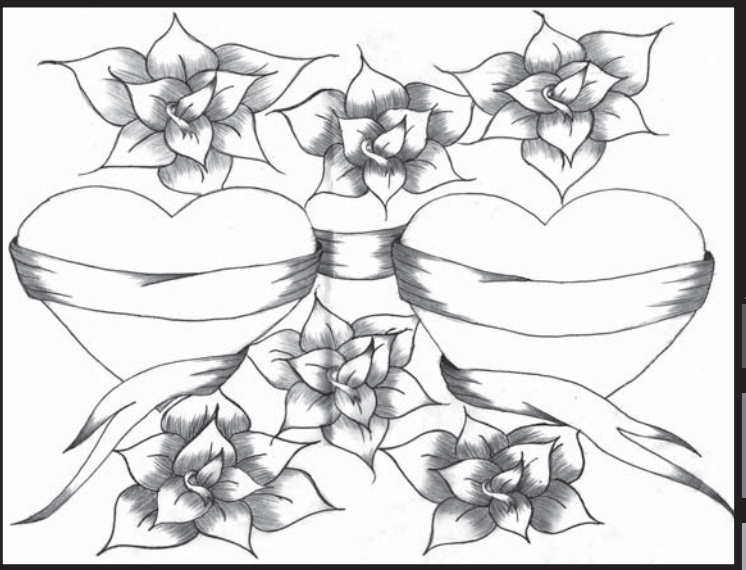
Doing that will be good for about a month or two, and then I'll get too cocky wit' it, an' mess around and get caught.

Then I'll be hella mad, but I sit back and think, even though the police be messin' wit' ninjas for no reason, if i don't give them a reason to jump on a ninja they couldn't really mess with me...

Out of all the obstacles I can think of , I think I'm the biggest one.

-Ray Ray, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Here's one thing that you have in common, with almost everybody locked up. You are a big obstacle in your way. Here's one thing that sets you apart though: You know it. Everything about this piece shows a young man with his eyes wide open, a young man who knows how he ended up at the place he is today. Understanding is the first step towards making a change, so you're actually ahead of the game, because we bet you could probably even pinpoint the exact spot where you start slipping. When was it? Your first drink of alchohol? Your first blunt? Your first time back in the hood? Maybe if you can figure out where that first slip up takes place, you can figure out a plan for how to combat it in the future. Either way, great writing as always.



My Ticket Out

My ticket out of poverty
Will not be hypocrisy
If the law don't bother
And the feds stop watching me
I can get rich with this poetry
And continue tryin' to make cheese
Block hot like a hundred degrees
Me be a sucka? Ninja, please!
But I still say, "Lord, please!"
Hands together on my knees
I can get street
If you know what I mean
'Hood life just ain't the place to be
'Cause ninjas out here playin' keeps
Half these cats can't write or read
But that's my ticket out of poverty

-James, Marin

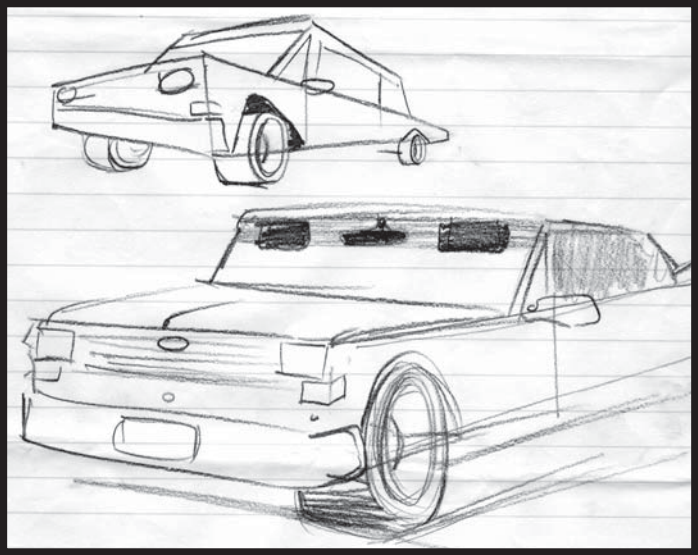
From The Beat: Yes, you know the street lifestyle, and yes you know there is a better route too, and with that we hope you take the route that will allow you to prosper. What's the game plan?

A Little Okay

a touch
without a feel
would be the hands
of a madman
wanting to be
among the people
who feel the touch
of what's there
and what they think
is there
but a madman
can be mad
and still touch
with feeling

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Traditionally, there is a sort of divine madness that raises one above the self-centered concerns of the daily grind. However, without a sacred tradition to limit and guide, you'd do best to keep a balanced mind. (You might be surprised how many locked inside these rooms touch without feeling.)



Feeling

it's just a little crush
my life is nothing but
pain, evil and lust
all because i was broken
at such an early age
it was too much
now it's too hard to cage
it all in
at one point begins
an end to a means
as i till this day
try to spread my wings
but different things
distract my attention
lost in a search for love
sorry if that i already mentioned
but screw all the snacks
i want the whole kitchen
now about this time around
i'm like a summer thunder storm
unpredictable to any leaps and bounds
that fall my way
and i'll be more than happy

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: First you must reeducate your heart before you can rely on spontaneity to spark your happy-ever-after'ings in the realm of love. It may seem you can choose between owning the kitchen and snatching up snacks, but the economy of love does not work like that. Let's use the Bible again, 'cause most of us know the stories. The Hebrews move to Egypt through Joseph's genius in the employ of Pharaoh, storing great warehouses against a coming famine. Yet they become slaves there eventually, and must learn again to be free — and this is the economy of love: Forty years in the desert, relying on manna from above. Every day enough food (manna) was provided by the Lord, but those who tried to store it, found it rotten the next day. Love works the same way. If you were broken early, then it's time to get fixed. You were a child then, but a man and a father (you say dad) must step up and move in. No, don't cage your feelings, engage them. Find the seeds of your rage and cease to water them. Cultivate the best in yourself, and let lust be an ornament of joy on love's illuminated page as you re-educate your heart, from love's damaged child to its sage, not lost but found — the flashes of rage will disappear as quickly as thunder's sound.

Hide and Go Seek

let's play a game
with no emotions
with no strings attached
lights, stage, audience
let's begin the act
open the eyes
let's trick them (the audience)
but without all lies
so please take off the disguise
just this one time
because i got all the supplies
that you can ever need
so if you don't mind
i'd like to fix a few things
if you just give me the time
so give me some lust, trust and love
or i can mislead the blind
and there's no need to hide
because i already found you

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You fluency of your poetic argument leads us step by step from "no emotions" to "trust and love" — and we suspect, yes, there is some sort of trick in the words above. And then with a sinister his, we see the connection we almost missed: "so give me some lust ... or i can mislead the blind." All those promises almost make one forget, behind it all is a pimpish threat. Oh no, throw salt in the field and no true love can grow.

The Last Cry: Eight and a Half

consumed agony
from a murder
that took place
and the blood of trust
lathers in my mind
about how vile
your wrath was
to make a man self-destruct
like i have a million times before
and yet i still didn't learn
up until this final time
finally cried out for my name
to go the opposite way
before i fall for the same trap
all because i saw
my mental blood dried
on the cold floor
that you once slaughtered me on
when you posed as a friend
but i've learned my mistakes
and it won't happen again

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you've self-destructed a million times before, it means it's a habit deep in your core, and not what triggered it again but finding that source deep within to face it, (alas) feel it, and (at last emerging from the past) heal it. Only then will the muse of memory become the muse of inspiration. We are slaves to the patterns of the past until we are willing to face them and chase them out of our hearts. That's a hero's journey, and it's time that you start. Or blame yourself, not your friend, when it happens to you again.

Given the Gone

waiting for something
that will never come again
it felt so good to have
it should have been a sin

-Jacob, 150 Crew

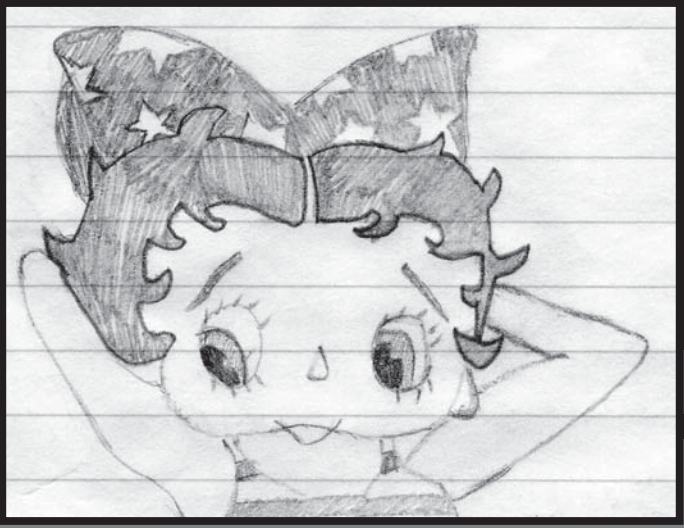
From The Beat: Let love fly on wings of freedom, and the gifts of love will return to you when you most need them. A sin is to hold another in slavery to your will. Love must fly free, or be killed.

All This From a Strawberry

poised prompt
and halfway blurred
perfect as well as flawed
the border between isn't assured
    gone now
    with a sweet taint on tongue
    a red poison not deadly
    like bullets without a gun

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: "Like bullets without a gun" — sweetness (with the power to kill) that harms no one, for the open heart like a tongue tastes both perfection and flaw as love's sweet reason.



No Sound Is Worth

silence
is gold
or a scream for help
a mind lost in itself
or a peace of bliss
that can make us feel
like we own the world
in between
spaces
that we wish we could fill
a golden scream
sane
and insane
a middle lane
is it possible

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Not only possible, but the poet's métier, to integrate the surface and the depths, that for a space the reader may destigmatize unreason, to reveal a heartfelt season of bliss, when the heart and the mind meet in a mutual kiss. Who is screaming then? The man of reason and the demon deep within, assume angel's wings and rise on the music, silence and sound interweaving, both in the fabric of the poet's screaming — for the meaning is found in the spaces, as the words drive down the middle lanes of overturning pages.

Dr. Jackel and Mr. Hide

Part One
lights on
but someone home
no corruption at all
at least not shown
    i ask did you ever see
    anyone, my fatal lies
    because i often wear a mask
    and masquerade in a timeless disguise
four-thirty, should i wake up
then find myself precious in my sleep
any fool can break the day
but for the night, what can that mean
    so why do i feel again rage
    just keep the light off
    to keep my other side on
so why do i feel again rage
please keep the light off
to leash my other side on
beauty is only skin deep
but ugly is down to the bone
you can't know
you couldn't have known
Part Two
walking in reality
running in a dream
my verse darkens
in my mind
i think to myself
"no one runs faster than you can"
another voice
"no one runs faster than you"
can't catch me
can't capture me
'cause i'm running for us all
wake up to lust
can't find a cure
but i can kill
if i may, i have made my own self
covered with others' plasma and tears
he bit me
as a desperate attempt
but nothing it did
all this in a dream
i won't stand in your way
just let you run and hide

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: "Jeckyll" to "Jackel" and "Hyde" to "Hide" — it puts a twist from the start in the old story. Did you know when Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the original story he was de-toxing from addiction to cocaine? In his story, the good doctor is attempting to find a chemical formula that will distill (separate) good from evil. But what is Aquinas was right, and there is no evil per se, it is rather the absence of the appropriate good in any given situation? Then, rather than purifying good, Jeckyll was poisoning it, or rather drugging it to the delirium in which the appropriate (right) good is lost from consciousness. As we all know, we can hypothesize situations in which even to kill is not an evil but a (relative) good (which is not to say all hypotheses in this regard are true or correct). If all this sounds too abstract, then look at your rage. Perhaps it's a natural response to being locked in a cage, an alternative to despair even. The whole trick of the thing is to harness your rage and redirect it within, for it is the error in your own vision (to which all subsequent action is but a reaction) that is ground zero. The root of the problem is often found in fear, perhaps traumatic residues from the past, and its inappropriate eruption within, sparked not by a present (necessity of) reality but some trigger to a memory so painful as to distort balanced perception. When you see clearly, you will not only see the appropriate (right) good but you will desire it, too. The battle for you lies within, to kill the fixed form of the past to liberate the innocent inspiration in you once again (higher innocence is not ignorance, rather in the words of Jesus to his disciples: "Be cunning as a fox, innocent as a dove.")

beauty is only skin deep
but ugly is down to the bone

Chaos

Sanity challenged by chaos
A monster only in want of destruction
A hunger for a joyful being
To have all that is sorrow
All that is corruption
Weakness is your feast
Devoured for the willpower I severely need
Strive to be in control
Balance, happiness success...
Imagine getting by with all three
Am I sane?
I contemplate never ending this shhh that makes me stressed
I don't know if anything good makes me happy
Am I to spend my whole life depressed
I think, I weep
What's the point in this?

-Whispers

From The Beat: What's the point? The point is that you are alive, that you are an intelligent, thinking, feeling human being who cannot know what tomorrow holds. The past that has brought you here (both physically here and emotionally here) is not the future, which you will write. It's true that part of the ink you will write your future with is anger and pain, but that should motivate you to see things anew, to face down your demons in order to build a life that isn't mired in depression. We cannot predict the future — and the "we" in that sentence includes you. Sane or insane? We don't know. But that you can be fully human and able to grow into your potential — to love, to make your own family, to continue educating yourself, to provide, to teach others from your own sad experiences — that we have no doubt about. And that's the point.

Tupac

Tupac is my favorite rapper because of his lyrics and songs. Most of his songs speak about reality and about what was happening in his life and in other people's lives.

The song "Dear Mama" relates to me in many ways. One of the ways is how I grew up, hating and knowing that my father was alive but on the way to death. I hated my father because I would always look for that father figure and my own father was never there. So I started hanging out in the streets with older guys than me and they saw me as a younger sister. They all sold drugs so I started to sell drugs.

They weren't bad people, but I was going in the wrong direction. I loved them for being there and showing me the type of love that I didn't get from my father. Sometimes it's good having some experiences about certain topics so that later on you can be able to talk about them to your own kids.

-Lisa

From The Beat: Yes, even after all the time that's passed since his death, Tupac still is real today. It's a shame that you — and so many others — were sired by boys who didn't understand what it meant to be men. (We don't use the word "father" because he was not a father to you.) What is truly tragic is that this pattern continues today, with so many boys willing and eager to have sex but unwilling to do anything responsible, either to protect their girlfriends from getting pregnant or protect themselves and their girlfriends from getting STDs. We hope that when you are a mother or auntie, that you will be able to teach the young boys in your family what it means to be responsible and respectful towards girls.

This Place

In and out since age twelve
This unit and that unit
Short term and long term sentences
I'm fifteen now, not much has changed
Same dirty rooms and same old rules
I got off probation but now I'm back on
Two weeks of freedom after two or three years
At night I look through the bars
To the little portion of sky I can see
I sit and think, "Dang! I messed up"
I had my freedom but I messed up yet again
Back to the court dates
Back to the halls
Don't know when I'm getting out
Two months, six months
Maybe both combined for all I know
But I do know one thing —
I won't make the same mistake again
I'ma do my time and when I get off probation this time
I won't get back on

-Grumpy

From The Beat: It always makes us sad to read pieces like this because it shows that the experience you had as a prisoner wasn't enough to make you stop doing the things that lead you to lock-up. Now you say that this time will be different and, of course, we hope it will. But haven't you said that to yourself before? What will be different this time that will make you keep that promise? What would it have taken for you not to have violated your probation this time?

The System Woes

Many people may feel that probation helps rehabilitate minors. In my case, it has done just the opposite. I started off just as a little kid that followed some friends and vandalized. From there it was downhill. Not too long after that, I was smoking weed and everything was good. Once I got caught up on drugs (marijuana) charges, then I entered the dark underbelly of the beast.

Since I could not see my beloved Mary Jane, I turned to worse drugs that either could not be tested or which got out of my system quickly. I tried just about every drug out there except PCP and peyote, and all I was doing was wasting time, money and brain cells.

Over the years everyone has told me I am a bright kid, but over the couple of years I have been on probation I have been only doing enough to get by. Well, I am telling you now I am sick and tired of this bs. Now all I want to do is get a regular life back, maybe a good future for myself, and reunite with my lover, Mary Jane. I am willing to do what it takes to accomplish my goals.

-Grinch

From The Beat: It's very obvious that you ARE a bright kid, and that's a gift, so we're not disputing your belief that getting into the system to begin with can lead to an even deeper hole than the one you dug for yourself. And we most definitely admire your stated determination to "get a regular life back," and all that goes with it. But here's our question: What will you do if "what it takes to accomplish your goals" includes avoiding the reunion with your lover, MJ? We're asking the "what if" question because we can easily imagine the situation where you will have to meet certain conditions to move forward with your life in freedom, and you might then be faced with that choice that can lead to one path or another — use your freedom to smoke and risk losing it, or sacrifice your love for weed in order to accomplish the goal of getting off probation and on with your life. If this is the choice that you'll face, how will you choose?

I'm Sorry, Mom

"Dear Mama" means to me that Tupac is talking about how much he loves his mama and sorry for things he done that was wrong. I like this song because it always reminds me of how much I love my mama and how sorry I am for stealing and disobeying my mom when she needed me to help her with carrying bags and help her bring stuff in.

Now I am back in San Mateo when my mom is at home, mad that I made another mistake. "Dear Mama" also reminds me that you should obey what your mom has to say because everything your mom says is true in some way.

I always love to see my mom happy. I am not letting my mom down. I will always be there for my mom. I hate living a bad life, but when I transfer to San Francisco I will hope to do good and stay good toward everybody.

-Lil' Steve

From The Beat: We hope you can remember how much you owe your mother for all she has done for you. Sometimes, the lessons you have learned about treating those that love you with more honor and respect come too late. But in your case, you still have plenty of time to put those lessons to work in your life — to make your mom proud of you, and in so doing, to make you proud of yourself. Good luck.

The Ones

My homies son como otra familia mia (are like my other family). They've been there for me in good and bad times, and happy and sad. They were also the ones that I got in pedos (trouble) with, but they helped me learn from my mistakes.

There were also the "homies" who said they were my homies but didn't give a shhh about me and did me wrong. The ones who really care were there to gimme love when I didn't have it.

Now I'm in here for my carnalas and homies who helped me out and opened up their cantonas (homes) to me. Once you get back to the ones who loved you and gave you a hand, se siente chido (it feels good), and you see who really cares for you and that was mis homies.

-Morenita

From The Beat: The sad truth about what you've written, Morenita, is that you were unable to find the love that every child deserves from her own family. We admire your homies for providing you with that love, but we hate the fact that you had to go to the streets to find it, because there are so many negative consequences that come with that life. We hope, when you finally get out of this situation, you will be able to be with your true homies (the ones who do care about you) in a way that doesn't lead you to do the kinds of things that lead you to lose your freedom (or your temper, or your dignity). You have some real gifts (your ability to write being among them), and we hope those gifts take you far away from the world of lock-ups.

What's Making Me Stronger

The thing that's making me stronger is knowing how much time I got, three –six months at the new camp, and knowing they can't keep me here forever. By taking one day at a time, my time will slowly go away and I'll soon be kicking it with the family and my folks. Also just knowing someone special to me who is on the outs waiting for me when I get out makes my happy.

-Deboriah

From the Beat: We understand why you're focusing on the time you have to do, but we hope you spend as much time really thinking about what you're going to do after you do your time. Of course, it's always nice to have someone special waiting for you, but you need a plan for yourself that includes school and some clear direction, a road that doesn't lead back here. So, what's your plan to stay free?

Unspoken Words

I cannot speak
My heart burns with pain
Your overwhelming touch
Brings a misguided heart to shame
Now I'm restricted from love
From a stupid mistake
There is never a minute in my thoughts
That you name escapes

-Whispers

From The Beat: Is the touch that brings your heart to shame a loving touch or an abusive one? When you say you're restricted from love, do you mean you can't get back with a certain person because of a mistake you made? We wish we knew more about this painful story, Whispers, but at least we're glad that you can express some of it (even if you have to whisper it) in The Beat.

Got Caught

I got caught robbing two white boys and now I'm in Hillcrest doing my time. I should be on the outs enjoying my summertime.

-Dubee

From The Beat: Yes, you should be out doing what young people do in the summertime. So, how come you robbed anyone (whatever color they might have been)? Can you write about the crime of robbery itself? Tell us whether you think it's okay to take from others, and why. You already know the consequences, but what do you think of that crime itself? If it happened to you (or to your family), would you have a different opinion about it?

The Street Life

The street life for me is like a family to me. The love I wasn't getting from my parent I was getting from the streets. I got allowance and I got discipline. The love I never got from a father I got from the older people out in the streets. They watched out for me, taught me right from wrong. They taught me about sex and everything else I needed to know.

The love I was missing from my mother I got from the females. I think that's why I have always kept more than one girl because I was looking for love. I sold drugs ever since I was eight years old. I started getting popular. I liked the attention. I like the feeling of love. If I ever become a father, I would do my best to give it the love I never got.

-Lil' Daddy

From the Beat: Sometimes when children become parents themselves, they just repeat the mistakes they learned from their own parents when they were growing up. How will you keep that from happening? What will you do with your children that you never got at home? What would you do if one of your sons or daughters started down the path you've been traveling, getting into trouble on the streets? It's a shame that you didn't get the love you were entitled to at home, but it's a comfort to know that there were people who schooled you and loved you. Now the trick is to figure out a way to honor those who loved you without sacrificing yourself (your health, your freedom, your life) for the street life. You now know the consequences of both growing up without the love of a father and the consequences of selling drugs, etc., on the streets. What will you do with this knowledge to avoid these consequences in the future?

What's Making Me Stronger

What's making me stronger is not being in here but missing out on the things that I should have cherished when I was physically free, like being with my brother, staying and helping my mom and enjoying life itself — to be grateful for the things I have and not to take advantage of it. Doing drugs like I was (smoking weed every day and drinking) made me not care about life with the "I don't give a damn attitude," which is bad.

2Pac Shakur was shot five times before the second time he was shot, and that was a sign from God for him to calm down and stop doing the things he did, such as being with women, drugs and being with homies. So 2Pac did not get the sign. He said after the first time he was shot, "Got shot 5 times but I'm still breathin'." This made him feel invincible and made him angrier, with a stronger mentality of not giving a shhh.

So now I do give a shhh because the true things that I loved, being my family, was taken away from me and it's making me stronger by making me realize when I get out to change. This place will only do two things to you: make you stronger or make you weaker. For example, people who are in gangs and get locked up and feel it's worth being in jail for the gang and that's part of the life you choose are truly fools and are confused about their life and do not truly know their place. You end up losing your friends or your own life, even your family because of this. And it will be like that until you will truly learn, because if you don't learn now, the consequences will be much worse later on. I promise you.

-Makforilla

From The Beat: Well, even if Tupac didn't heed the clear warnings that he was living a dangerous life, did his lyrics speak to you in any way? What was it about your life that led you to smoking weed and drinking? Whatever the answer to that question, we hope you are able to follow through on the clear lessons you express in your writing. In particular, we hope you don't go back to alcohol because, as an alcoholic friend of ours once put it, "There's no problem that alcohol can't make worse..."

Invisible Tattoos

There are so many things I want to say
But I cannot speak
Tears fall from my eyes
Soaking my cheeks
Pain so intense
In my mind I scream
Burning flesh made into a bracelet just for me

-Whispers

From The Beat: We want to know the full story behind this very sad poem. Is that burning flesh something you did to yourself, something that was done to you, or just a symbol? Why is your pain so intense, and how do you deal with it? You can scream as loud as you want on these pages.

Como Ha Sido Mi Vida Y Como Será

Hey que ondas? Soy Jonathan, homitos. Pues estoy un poco enojado porque perdi la semana solo porque me quite el pelo como pandillero. Ustedes saben que en el Rancho te dan tiempo si haces algo malo y nosotros no podemos hacer nada. A mí, la vez pasada me dieron cuatro semanas muertas y corri de aqui. No sirvio de nada porque me arrestaron el mismo día en la casa.

Tuve suerte que me regresaron aqui. Tuve que empezar todo el programa de nuevo, pero no me aguito. Se que para el Febrero del 2007 salga de aqui.

Mis planes son estar con mi ruca y mis homitos de nuevo. Estraño todo.

Si soy un pandillero, tengo que pasar todo esto y mucho más porque desde que uno se mete en una pandilla, sabe a lo que se mete. Por ejemplo, yo estoy por vida en mi barrio. Pues homitos, ya saben tienes que ser un soldado por vida como yo y mis homies.

From The Beat: No, no sabes en lo que te estas metiendo. Sentimos mucho escuchar la manera como nos has escrito. Estas cometiendo un grave, grave error en tu vida, y sino reflecciones ahorita que estas joven lo haras cuando estes en el mero infierno si es que crees que en el. ¿Date un vistazo a tu vida y dinos que es lo que miras en esa vida tan mal que llebas? ¿Por que representar algo que no te trae nada bueno en tu vida? Hay mucha gente que nacieron con desabilitados, sin poder moverse, hablar, escuchar, y tu tienes todos esos dones. ¿Para qué lo pierdas por un color y dos letras que no sirven para nada?¿Si eres pandillero y estas dispuesto a dar tu vida por el barrio, aparte de los consejos que te damos y te han dado, no incluyas a otras personas.

How My Life Has Been And How It Will Be

Hey, what's up? It's me, Jonathan, homies. Well, I'm a little bit upset because I lost a week because I styled my hair like a gang banger would. Y'all know that in the Ranch, they give you time if you do something bad, and we can't do anything. Last time, they gave me four weeks of dead time and I ran from there. It didn't do me any good because I got arrested that same day at my house.

I was lucky that they sent me back to this place. I had to start the program all over again, but I didn't let that get me down. I know that in February 2007, I will be getting out of this place.

My plans are to be reunited with my girlfriend and my homies again. I miss everything.

Yes, I am a gangster. I have to go through all this and much more because since the moment you get yourself jumped into a gang, you know what you're getting yourself into. For example: I am in my 'hood for life. Well, y'all already know.

-Jonathan

From The Beat: No, you don't know what you're getting yourself into. It pains us to hear the way you have written to us. You are committing a grave, grave, error in your life, and if you don't reflect now that you are young, you'll do so when you're in hell, if this is what you truly believe. Take a look at your own life and tell us: What is it that you see in that wicked life that you lead? Why represent something that doesn't bring anything good to your life? There are many people on this Earth that were born with disabilities, without being able to move, speak, listen, and you have all these senses. Why risk losing them over a color and two letters that are not good for anything? If you are a gangster and you are willing to give your life for the 'hood, aside from the advice that we give you and you have been given, don't include other people.

Acting On Emotions Made Me Stronger

They say insight is like a light that shows you a path into a better life. In my life, as a teenager with a few obstacles, gaining experience in the wrong path put me in a place where learning how to act on emotions made me stronger. Discovering the inner workings of myself led me to acting calmly in any situation.

Choosing which road to walk down and how to walk the street didn't come naturally to me. When I had an impulsive emotion, I always somehow made a bad decision. Making a bad decision would create an even larger hole for myself to climb out of. So now that I have a hole to climb out of and a long road to walk with the justice system, I chose to take that walk.

I know now, though, that looking out for myself has a large impact on family and close friends. I never want to put the stress I put on all of them ever again. I found strength within.

-Silent Knight

From The Beat: Finding strength within is the kind that lasts, the kind that can carry you through the turbulence that every life encounters. How did you find this strength? Where does it come from? Was there one particular experience that has led you to "take that walk" along a new path? Or was it the accumulation of a lifetime's experiences?

In The Way

There are a lot of things that stand between me and the things I want to do, like group homes. That's the main thing. Every time I go to a group home I spend a couple of months there and I get terminated. It happened in the last one I was in. That's why I came to San Mateo Juvenile Hall, 'cause I'm from the City.

It's just that I was in a group home in San Mateo for nine months and then I got arrested and now I have to wait thirty days before I get transferred to YGC up in the City. Well, that's about it. I just have to keep my head up and think positive so I can get the best of it.

-Smiley

From The Beat: When you "think positive," what are you thinking about? Why do you keep getting terminated from your group homes? If you say, "I don't know," then it's up to you to find out, because if you "don't know" what leads you back to lock-up, then you'll be spending a lot more time in that condition... We'll see you when you get to YGC...

In The Way

I was born in May
I was raised in the Bay
Started smokin' sticky hay
It made a barricade that stood in the way
It relieved my stress but made me depressed
But I still couldn't put it to rest
It was holding me back from the studies that I lacked
Which made me fall back
Started stealing stuff 'cause I didn't have enough
Today I'm locked up and I finally gave it up
And the only way I'm going is up

-Hydro

From The Beat: We really hope you follow through on what you state here, Hydro, because it's clear that you have a lot on the ball. You recognize where your smoking has led you, and how it has interfered with the things that will move you forward, like your education. But recognition is not enough. In here, it's easy to promise that "I finally gave it up," because you can't get it! But how will you keep that promise when you're out there and forced to deal with the temptations that will certainly come your way? We hope you have the inner-strength to be able to say "No" when the time comes.

My Hustle Makes Me Stronger

What makes me stronger is being on my own hustle. I know hustlin' is wrong, but it just a temporary way of life you just do to get out of the 'hood. My 'hood has to be hard as hell to get out of, with the killings and FEDS getting around. But if you do get away without a scratch you are stronger.

-BB

From The Beat: How many do you know who got away without a scratch? Anyone (like you) who has been picked up by the cops and sent to jail (juvenile hall) is already scratched — and that scratch is already visible to the authorities to monitor such things. You say your hustle is "a temporary way of life," but how do you know that? What makes it temporary? If you get caught for something and go down for a long time, was it temporary? If you get hurt (or worse), was it temporary? The problem we have with your analysis is that we know far too many people, young and old, who thought they could do what they did for just a minute, then move on, who are now doing long stretches in state prison wishing they had stopped just a minute before they did... Don't wait. Stop!

Relating To Tupac

I can relate to Tupac Shakur's "Dear Mama" because my mother left me as a toddler. She was a wasted woman who couldn't support me. My father took me in, but I was very angry because I didn't understand.

I hated my world and many people in it. I met some new friends and got into a lot of trouble with them. Because they showed me love, I did the same too. I am who I am, love me or hate me, I don't care.

My mother probably doesn't care but I don't know that. I know it's not my fault but stuff happens and it could be good or bad and it changes people. You could either learn from it or be stupid. I'd rather learn from it.

-Glenda

From The Beat: What have you learned from growing up without a mother? Do you know her at all, or is she completely absent from your life? Do you ever wonder what her childhood was like that led her to be the "wasted woman" she became? Do you think that if she had been able to mother you as she should have, you would have avoided finding a substitute family that led you into trouble?

Trying To Keep Up My Strength

One of the things that is making me stronger is the words my carnal told me before he passed away. They made me strong 'cause he always wanted me to be a strong young lady. The words he will tell me made me hold on and reminisce the times we shared.

I know I have a deep emptiness, but I just have his words in my mind. Every day is hard for me to go on, but sometimes I just get weak. I'll get the words my brother told me in my mind and I'm being strong 'cause I'm going to do it just for him so he can be like my angel around me, being really glad, saying, "My carnalita is a strong young lady." So I'm just going to hold on tight and be strong. Alrato. Always,

-Tiny

From The Beat: We're sorry you lost your brother, but it's good you have his words of support to keep you strong. The only thing is, you didn't tell us what he told you that gives you that strength.

Anger

Blazed anger degrades me.
Courtesy?
I forgot.
Give and get got.
Give kindness to get love
in many situations.
Abruptly awoken bringing
in the agitations.
Fear of loss brings our
sight together
To denounce the hate.
Maybe it was love that
brought us together.
Maybe it was fate.

-Whispers

From The Beat: We like this poem, even though there are parts of it we don't understand. We can tell that you're angry, but not why. Also, we don't know who you are addressing at the end when you say that love or fate brought you together. We'd love to read more about this.

It's Unfair

I don't want to be here. It's unfair that I am here. But I know I deserve it. But I think of the good things, like the new camp.

-Frisca

From The Beat: If you know you "deserve it" why is being here unfair? What do you think would be "fair" for whatever it was you did that led you here?

On The Road To Becoming Stronger

There have been many things that have made me stronger. Choosing new friends, doing better things in my life. Decisions would be one of the bigger things that I'm still working on. As long as I can do all of these things, nothing will stop me.

So I want to be a stronger and better person and the first thing I had to work on was my friends. I had to figure out who were my real friends. Some of the people I stopped hanging with I was really good friends with. But I had to do it and it was really hard.

Then I stopped hanging around places where I used to do some of the things that got me here. I then got a good job with the California State Parks as a housekeeper. Yes, I cleaned toilets, but it paid really good.

A really good thing that happened to me was NA meetings. NA saved my life more times than I could imagine. I tried meth one day and the next day I got tested. But without NA I would be lost. So like I said, as long as I can keep this up I will become the strongest man alive. You can do the same. Just believe in yourself.

-Joey

From The Beat: We can imagine how hard it must be to cut off "friends" who, when you examine where you want your life to go, aren't really friends at all. So we already know how strong you must be to have done that, and we admire you for it. Avoiding the places where you did things likely to lead to trouble is another example of your strength and maturity. Finally, owning up to your drug problem and finding help to deal with it tells us that you are definitely walking a new road, and one that leads away from juvenile halls and jails. Just keep walking that road!

It Made Me Sane

Everything happens for a reason. For every action there is a reaction.

Deaths turn to births. All true, but does it click?

It took a while for me to understand anything that was being said to me. I would get in trouble, then go out and do it again. Sometimes it takes something bad to happen in order to change the way you act. Maybe even getting robbed will make you stop slangin' dope. Though for me, I really lost something that tore me apart.

My cousin, Andrew O., died on August 31, 2006. Before any of this happened, I planned out my future plans. Do good while I'm on probation, graduate my program, and start selling dope again. When I first heard what had happened, I wouldn't believe it. It made me really think about what I want in life and made me change my mind about EVERYTHING.

I want everyone to always remember this. You don't know what you got till it's gone. I love you, Andrew. You'll always and forever remain in my heart.

-Jelly Bean

From The Beat: Yes, sometimes it takes something truly shocking to make people re-examine their lives and priorities. We are so sorry that you lost Andrew so recently, and we admire your strong character to be able to deal with the pain of that loss in The Beat, and even more for being able to take in the full significance of his loss to your own life. We hope you find a way to honor Andrew by living your own life to the fullest — and by that, we don't mean making money on the streets, but making your life all that it can be through family and education and work. By honoring yourself, you honor him.

Que Es Lo Que Te Hace Fuerte

Lo que me hace fuerte es que mi familia siempre este conmigo y que me apoyen en lo que sea, que me den consejos, que me hablen de lo bueno y que esten conmigo en las buenas y en las malas. También que cuando siempre necesite un consejo que mi padre y mi madre esten ahí. Que me digan, "no hagas eso, es malo, no debes de vender drogas porque arruinas la vida de las personas, vendiendo drogas. Sigue el camino bueno y trabaja y gana dinero honradamente y nunca te metas en problemas."

Me haría fuerte que mi padre me diga "hijo esto no esta bien, haz lo correcto y nunca tendras problemas como ir a la carcel. Si buscas las cosas de Dios, el siempre estara contigo y no te dejara caer en el mal.

From The Beat: ¿Tienes padres que te digan esto? ¿Te han aconsejado alguna vez? ¿No sera que te han dicho que hace, pero tú no le has puesto atención? O si no tienes a estos padres, por lo menos los consejos ya los tienes en papel. Tú ya eres grande y puedes guiarte a ti mismo al camino bueno.

What Makes Me Strong

What makes me strong is when my family is always with me and they support me in whatever I am doing, when they give me advice, when they talk to me about what's good and when they are with me during good times, and bad times. When they tell me: "Don't do that! That's bad! You shouldn't sell drugs because by selling drugs, you are ruining other people's lives. Follow the good path and work and earn money honestly and never get yourself into problems."

It would make me strong if my father told me, "Son, this is not cool. Do what's right and you'll never have problems like going to jail. If you seek God's things, He will always be with you and He will not allow you to succumb to bad.

-Douglas B1

From The Beat: Do you have parents that tell you this? Have they given you advice at some time or another? Or could it be that they have told you all this, but you're just not paying attention to what they are saying? Or, if you don't have these kinds of parents, at least you already have those words of advice on paper. You are already a grown-up and you can guide yourself to the good path.

Lo Que Quiero Olvidar

Lo que quiero olvidar son todas las cosas como por ejemplo, usar drogas. Quiero dejar todo eso. Ahora quiero respetar a las personas mayores que yo.

Cuando estaba afuera no respetaba a la gente. Les hacía una jestos de cara como si ellos me debieran algo. Cuando entre a la cárcel cambia. Cuando salga ya no voy a ser el mismo.

Mi hermano me decía todo esto. Me decía, "Hey, no hagas las cosas malas porque no está bien." Lo malo es que yo no entendía nada y mira ahora donde estoy? En la cárcel.

From The Beat: Que bien que estes pensando de esta manera. Deberías de seguir un poco más los consejos de tu hermano. Ellos saben lo mejor para ti. En la manera como ibas no ibas en buen camino y es mejor que pares ahora antes que fuera demaciado tarde.

What I Want To Forget

What I want to forget is everything, like for example, using drugs. I want to leave all that alone. Now, I want to respect those who are my elders.

When I was on the outs, I didn't respect people. I would give people all kinds of looks like if they owed me something. When I came to jail, I changed. When I get out, I am no longer going to be the same.

My brother would tell me all of this. He would tell me, "Don't do bad things because it's not right." The bad thing was, I didn't understand anything and look at where I am? In jail.

-Calixto, Marin

From The Beat: That's good that you are thinking this way. You should listen to your brother's advice more often. They know what's best for you. In regards to the way you were living, you were not following a good road and it is best if you stopped doing what you were doing now before it gets too late.

Hasta La Muerte

Q-onda? Soy El Soldado y la cosa que me gustaría olvidar son las cosas que amo como mi familia y mi novia. Quiero olvidar todo lo que amo porque de nada sirve que quiera a las personas que amo sino puedo estar con ellos. Soy un pandillero y nunca voy a dejar de ser un pandillero. Tal vez me toque ir a prisión por vida. Ojalá y eso no pase. Si soy pandillero se que algún día voy a estar en prisión o muerto. Soy un soldado hasta la muerte. Un saludo a los Catrachos

From The Beat: Te has dado cuenta lo que has dicho aqui. Sabes, decir las cosas no es lo mismo que vivirlas. Estamos seguro que si estubieras ahí, pensarías bien la cosa, y te arrepintieras ser lo que eres. ¿Qué tienes en la mente que no puedes darte cuenta lo que estas haciendo con tu vida? ¿Tu crees que ser pandillero es una buena cosa? Estas equivocado y nos da tristeza la forma como te expresastes. Acuerdate que la persona viven conforme a lo que piensan. ¿Y que piensas tú? Date cuenta tú mismo.

Until Death

What's up? I'm "The Soldier" and the thing that I would like to forget are the things that I love like my family and my girlfriend. I want to forget everything that I love because it doesn't do me any good to love the people that I do if I cannot be with them. I'm a gangster and I'm never going to stop being one. Maybe it was meant for me to go to prison for life. Hopefully that doesn't happen. Yes, I am a gangster. I know that one day I'm going to be in prison or dead. I'm a soldier until death. A shout-out goes out to all the Hondurean people.

-Cruz, LCRS

From The Beat: Are you aware of what you just said? You know something: Saying something isn't the same as living it. We're positive that if you were to be in there, you would think things over and you would regret being what you are. What is blocking your mind that is preventing you from seeing what you are doing with your life? Do you think being a gangster is a good thing? You're mistaken, and it makes us sad because of the way you're expressing yourself. Remember: People live in accordance with what they think. And what do you think? You need to realize what's up.

Lo Que Me Hace Sentir Bien

Lo que me hace fuerte es que me hable bien de mi familia, que me apollen, que me hagan sentir bien, que me ayuden a salir adelante. Eso me hace sentirme fuerte, que me pongan en el buen camino, que me digan que soy un buen hijo, que me digan que me quieren mucho, que me hablen de la Biblia, que me hablen bien de mis hermanos. Eso es lo único que me hace ser fuerte. La otra cosa que me hace sentir fuerte es que me aconseje una persona adulta y que me den buen consejos.

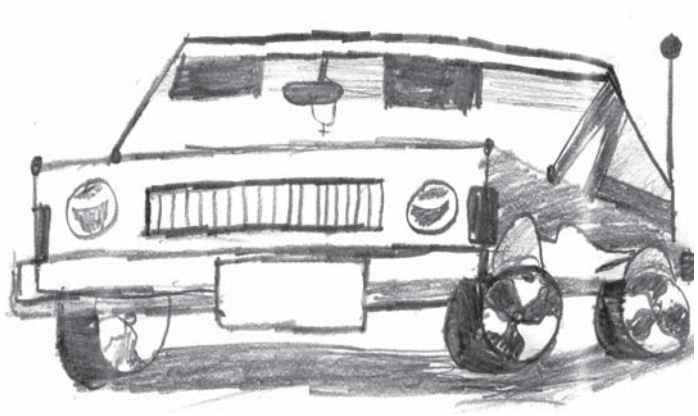
From The Beat: Parece que tienes mucha gente que te quiere y que te dan consejos, pero tu no les estas haciendo caso. ¿Que es lo que te estas pasando? Hazle caso a la gente que quiere lo mejor para ti.

What Makes Me Feel Good

What makes me feel strong is when my family speaks well about me, supports me, make me feel good, and help me come out ahead. That makes me feel strong when they place me on the right path, when they say that I am a good boy, when they tell me that they love me very much, when they talk to me about the Bible, and when they talk good about me to my brothers. That is the only thing that makes me strong. The other thing that makes me feel strong is when an adult gives me advice and gives me good advice.

-Alexander B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It appears to us that you have lots of people that love you and give you advice, but you are not listening to them. What is going on? Listen to the people that only want what's best for you.



Consejos De Tus Padres

Si estas en las drogas y tus padres te dicen que no le hagas a las cosas malas, eso es lo que te hace fuerte. Tus padres te aconsejan para que vayas por el buen camino. O una novia que te aconseje. Yo también tengo a un hermano que me hace sentir fuerte.

From The Beat: ¿Y tú tienes padres quienes te han dicho que hacer o no hacer? ¿Le has escuchado? Sino les has escuchado, los escucharías esta vez que salgas?

Words of Advice From Your Parents

If you are into drugs and your parents tell you not to do bad things, that is what makes you strong. Your parents give you advice so that you can follow the good road. Or a girlfriend that gives you advice. I also have a brother who makes me feel strong.

-Calixto, Marin

From The Beat: And do you have parents who have told you what to do or what not to do? Have you listened to them? If you have not listened to them, are you going to start listening to them once you get out?

Made Top Citizen

What's up Beat. This is Dreamer coming at you, just chillin' and waiting for camp to come and swoop me up. I'm keeping my head up, not lettin' my chin touch my chest.

I just made Top Citizen for my first time, so I guess I'm doin' a good program. I just wanna do my time and get back to my family and get to see my child being born. I want to change things for the good. I don't want to jeopardize my future to have a good life. Time to wrap it up.

Alrato. RIP Gimp and Lil' Toro

-Dreamer

From The Beat: Congratulations! Like we said in workshop, that line about your chin and your chest is some top flight writing -- and now you're even working your program like a pro too. But then we saw those gang references (which we cut, of course) and now we can't help but be a little worried. You want so much of the good -- your girl, your baby, your future -- but then that old lifestyle is still a part of your words... do you think you can really live positive if you're still caught up? If you think you can, write it and tell us why -- challenge us. But if you feel torn, think on that too. You've got too much to live for, too many dreams.

I'm Back

I'm back over here in juvenile hall, but this time it ain't for a lil bit; It's for longer. But, it's coo', when I get out I'm-a go back and kick it at the block.

-Lil' Cholo

From The Beat: Then we will see you back here soon -- don't ya' think? If you go back to the block and do what you did, it will bring you right back to where you are. Got another plan? Mature up!

Heart Broken Thanks To Rumors

What's good Beat? This Derrick, these girls do ninjas dirty! My female, or should I say ex-female broke up with me over some dumb-ass rumors about me cheating. I have done nothing but been faithful. She go by hearsay. She hurt me real bad. It's good, I'm a free agent. I'm gon' find a mature girl now.

Peace out much love.

-Derrick

From The Beat: Don't worry Derrick; life has a funny way of working out. If there is no trust in the relationship, and she is willing to end the relationship over some rumors, then she isn't the one for you. Thank God you found out before it's too late. Go look for that mature girl, but first be that mature man. Peace.

Dirty System

What really stands in my way is dirty cops, because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be behind these walls and doors. They was the ones that got me kicked out of school, while I was planning to go to school and be someone in life.

-Kevin

From The Beat: It's not too late to go back to those plans! What do you want to be in life? A teacher? A taxidriver? A father? A builder? A doctor? The cops did what they did, and you did what you did, but that's the past now. What happens from now on, whether you get caught up again, well isn't that up to you?

In Here

To wait in these walls,
Eighteen years old
In juvenile hall,
I'll stop sellin' drugs and keep makin' beats,
Go back to college
To fill up them seats
And open some here
For some ignorant peeps
Who instead of sheeps
Count days when they sleeps
A risk that ships by risks of Chris,
Keep the Beat.

-Chris

From The Beat: Chris, you flow, and there you go! But you must know, we love you bro. Oh yeah, good luck in college! Make us/ yourself proud!

Trusting Friends

Since I've been growing up I learned that it is never good to trust friends.

-Friendless

From The Beat: If you can't trust your friends, whom can you trust? It's really sad when you've been deceived by people who care about you. Trust is one of the most valuable things in a relationship. Don't let these experiences ruin your future relationships. We know it's hard, but be patient, you'll find someone you can trust. Just be careful whom you allow into your world.

Stronger

I went to jail one time when I was thirteen. Three times when I was fourteen and now I'm fifteen and back in here. I don't know why I keep coming back.

Every time I come here, it is because I robbed somebody. But every time I get caught, I get smarter, stronger and learn from what I did wrong. So, I don't get caught for the same thing.

-Cody

From The Beat: Please Cody! The lesson is: If you rob somebody, you go to jail! It would be nice to hear that at sixteen you are totally free and no longer hurting yourself or others.

Third Time Here

Man what up wit' it? They tryna go bad on me man. 'Cause this my third time up in here and they probably gon' send me to a group home.

But my patna Jaee got killed and it's bad. But Jaee Jaee, I love you bra. Watch over me, all the time man. I'm out fast, bruh.

-Antoine

From The Beat: We are sorry to hear about Jaee. Three times in the Hall ain't no joke! You are lucky to be going to a group home. If you keep living the way you are living you may end up in the System as an adult or worse. Watch over yourself. Be smart. Antoine, where is your life going?

Three by Baby Lou

I. Stronger

I feel that I made myself me stronger. I say this because of all of the things I been going through and the things I been through in my life, you know the ups and downs and the good and the bad.

II. What's in My Way?

I am going to keep it real -- fake people. Not just a few but all of them see that's not all cause of one the main things it the drug game 'cause I just can't let it go... so that's why I say the drug game gets in my way.

III. I am Good.

This yo' boy Baby Lou here to tell y'all that it don't stop, that I am still in here keeping it lit for all my ninjas, so keep yo' head up my mans. You got to feel me.

-Baby Lou

From The Beat: Who are the "realest" people you know, and what does real mean to you? Obviously it means people you can trust, people you know will never turn on you, people who can help you get what you want, but in the real world, who are those people for you. And when you get out, how will they help you reach the goals you have? Are they part of the drug game that gets in your way, like you wrote? Or are they people that are doing other things with their lives?

My Release

Boy, this Lil' Eli. The judge said I might get to go home. I'm not bout to nothing wrong this time. I'm bout to get me a job and go to school on everything.

I'm telling you, for everybody who wanna be hard, you might as well stop, cause all the squares and marks is the ones on the outs getting girls. I'm bout to square it up, ya' feel me!

-Lil' Eli

From The Beat: Whatever reason you can find to stay out of the Hall is a good one! Square it up, Lil' Eli!

Burglary!

Man, I'm back in here for a burglary. I'm 'bout through messin' with stupid scary people. The dudes I was with didn't know how to hit a lick and they was crying when we went down.

That shows me for now, only do my dirt to the neck. Man that's all I gotta say...

-Lil' Eli

From The Beat: Ever consider not doing dirt? That's the sure way to keep out of jail! Be smart!

Getting Money

What makes me stronger is getting money and taking care of myself, keeping clothes on my back. So that's one of the reasons that keep me strong. The other reason is being positive and street smart. Them the only things I could think about. I'm out.

-Lil Keith

From The Beat: Do you get that money legit? Or on the street? The reason we ask is because street money gets people caught up in shootings and the police, which means eventually they get weaker.

To Pac

A day never to be forgotten by those who remember Tupac Shakur he died in a hail of bullets but his lyrics live on. I'm out.

-Yung Mackey

From The Beat: We agree -- Pac's lyrics are timeless and he has touched so many lives. We hate that he went out the way he did. We hope his life and his lyrics can teach us something.

Selfish Thoughts

What's sup wit it Beat? This Daynisha. I'm hella mad that I'm in here. Before I came here you could not tell me shhh about me and my squad shhh you know how we get down.

They got me in here for a warrant. I can't wait 'till I get back out and do me, they tried to tow my car but I was not going out, so I'm gon' bounce back fast when I get out. I really can't wait to see my solid ninja that been holding me down and I been holding him down.

-Daynisha

From The Beat: First of all, referring to yourself as "the real Taliban" which we cut out is pretty serious, and offensive to many... What is it that your trying to say with that statement? That you are the baddest gagnsta ever? Well if that's the case, we are sure there will in due time be a place for you in the CDC and you'll regret the foolish thoughts you attempted to write in juvenile hall.

I Wonder If Heaven Got a Ghetto

"I was raised, the little young ninja doin bad shhh.
Talk much shhh 'cause I never had shhh.
I could remember being whopped in class.
And if I didn't pass mama whopped my ass.
Was it my fault papa didn't plan it out?
Broke out left me to be the man of the house?
I couldn't take it, had to make a profit.
Down the block, got a glock, and I clock grip.
Makin' G's was my mission,
Movin' enough of this shhh to get my mama out the kitchen and
Why must I sock a fella, just to live large like Rockefeller?"

-Lil' Ang

From The Beat: Reading Pac's lyrics like this remind us just how talented he was. And the fact that you chose to write them to tell us a little something about your own experience says a lot. We wish you had told us why you chose this particular song. We know there are a lot of young men who ended up taking on adult roles, like being man of the house, while they were still kids. We also know that this can bring on a struggle and pain that everyone doesn't understand. But be careful – even though you did what you thought you had to then does not mean you should use this as an excuse or a reason to keep living that life. There are other ways.

Strength

What makes me stronger is when I am with my family, just chilling and giving love to all of them. That's what makes me stronger and makes me feel proud of myself. Because a lot of people out here don't have love for their own family and that's not right because your family is the best thing that you can have in your life

- G-Money

From The Beat: It's easy to take family for granted but we gotta appreciate what we have!

Rest In Peace Emmit

Rest in peace Emmit bra we miss you a lot, how is everything up there?
Rest in peace Emmit: every time I'm behind these effed up walls I look up and just think of you bra I love you.
Rest in peace Emmit
Bra all these ninja say they know you, these ninja are fake bra
Rest In peace Emmit I got locked up again man guess what I am hyphyboy now.
Rest in peace Emmit
Bra I'm mad you died. You are my cousin that I love why you had to be the one in the car in crash? Why?
Rest in peace Emmit we miss you bra I love you a lot
Rest in peace Emmit!

-Lil' Rell

From The Beat: We never know why we are chosen, but we know we can all make better choices. We hope that your next taste of freedom helps you make the decision to stay free and live the good life Emmit lost.

I Wish I Was On The Out

Man I wish I was on the outs so that I can see my ninja and babygirl and my sister; so that I can get some weed and some E pills and some drink and get some money, you feel me? Man I wish I could get everything I need, you feel, and my ninja wait for me to get out, you feel me? To all waiting to get out, keep your head up, you feel me.

-BabyGurl

From The Beat: It doesn't sound like you're taking any lessons with you to the outside world, and that's too bad. We hope you come around to thinking more about what landed you in juvie and whether or not you want to continue the cycle.

Rest In Peace Cell

I was with Cell before he passed away.
I told him to be safe.
I got on the bus
the next day they said he was dead.

-Lil' Tie

From The Beat: We hear folks telling each other to be safe all the time, but what does "be safe" mean on the streets these days? Does it mean "good luck" or does it really mean, "make safe decisions?"

Staff Gave My Pizza Away

Staff gave my Damn pizza away, but it's cool. He knows that he was just hating on a pimp

-Baby B

From The Beat: You may think you're a pimp but if pimp is slang for a powerful person, then are you really a pimp if you're bouncing back and forth between freedom and the system? Next time stay free and you won't be complaining about some pizza.

Days Feel Like Years

What up Beat, well it's me again, Lil' Train in this unit, just doing my time. I go to court on the 19th and I hope they let me go home to be with my mom. This shhh making me mad, bein' away for my mom and sister.

I been here a few weeks and some days but it seem like I been here for some years. If they let me go home I won't come back here and that's a promise, but I don't think the judge is going to let me go home they might put me in a group home or camp for 6-9 months. One love to all y'all in The Hall, stay up.

-Lil' Trail

From The Beat: Stay up, no matter what they decide. Your mom and sister will be waiting for you with open arms when you get out. What will you do to make the most of your time while you're here?

I Wish, I Will

I wish you would step back up from that ledge my friend
We could capsize for the lies that you been living in
and if you do not want to see me again
I will understand

-Sugar

From The Beat: What a piece! Short and concise and well written. What inspired this piece?

Why?

It's me Lil' Dirt again trying to get free, but it seems like the further I go they don't see me. On the block every body selling bleam. Why it can't be me? I am locked up but it feels like am on a cross. Why me? Why always me, but I will be back why 'cause I am.

-Lil' Dirt

From The Beat: Why do you want to be back on the block again? For friendship? Power? Money? To get arrested again? We understand the pull of the block, but we want to hear from YOU just what it is that makes you want to be back there so bad.

In the Way at Camp

I get mad because of all of the people getting in my way at Camp. It's not that much room to move because of all the people who are coming to Camp. And we don't got a lot of programs to do.

So that's why all of the people in the way of the game, like when we play basketball or outdoor sports. But if they would build more stuff for us, then they won't be a lot of people in my way.

But thanks Beat for listening to what I got to say. Okay.

-Juanito

From The Beat: More basketball courts or more programs would help you keep peace of mind at Camp. Makes sense to us. Of course, in the meantime, watch that temper and stay chill.

In the Way

What up with it, Beat Within? I'm going to change it a lil' bit. I don't like to get in nobody's way 'cause I do not like for them to get in my way!

I really get mad when folk get in my way, start acting like somebody I don't even know. I need to talk to God, because that's the only person who can talk me down. And I don't want to go to the town actin' like a clown. A clown acts like a person who dumb, dumb, dumb — a person going wild like an animal.

-Choyce

From The Beat: A person who gets in the way of you doing wrong, is doing right by you. It may make you mad, 'cause you hate to feel frustrated, but sometimes love is getting in the way of the one you love heading toward getting killed or incarcerated.

What It Do Beat?

Well I have nine more days 'till I get out and I can go see my lil' girl and my ninja. Well I known that I am goin' to a group home on September 21, you feel me. It is good that I am going to be able to see my lil girl and family when they come to see me on the day when I leave this juvenile hall, you feel me.

Well my ninja is now payin' for what he did, but I'm sad that he did all that stuff that him and my friends did to me. Well, can't wait to those 9 days come till I leave this stupid Juvenile Hall because I'm tired of watchin four walls and not being able to go outside and talk to my family.

-Baby Gurl

From The Beat: We hope you enjoy your time with your family before you head off to the group home. Are you ready to do your time so you can get back to being a good mom for your daughter? Keep your head up...

My Favorite Cartoon Character Is "Stuey"

First of all 'cause he's a baby and he's bad. Second of all, when he talks don't know one know what he sayin'. He can curse and say anything but to the people it's just baby talk, but as you watch the show only you know what he sayin'. And that's what I like about him 'cause he can do what he want and get away with it.

-Adriqtce

From The Beat: Wouldn't it be nice if we could all say exactly what's on our mind and not have to offend people? But alas, we must be responsible about what we say and how it affects people around us.

Smile

Here's a message to the newborns, waitin' to
breathe -
If you believe then you can achieve
Just look at me.
Against all odds, though life is hard we carry on.
Livin' in the projects, broke with no lights on.
To all the seeds that follow me
Protect your essence.
Born with less, but you still precious.
Just smile for me now.

-Lil' Ang

From The Beat: More powerful Pac lyrics. When you heard this as a youngster did you feel like Pac was talking to you or did you feel like the one who should be seeing this to folks coming up? Either way, your life is precious and we all deserve to smile. So we hope you are taking these words to heart and are ready to be better to yourself.

Keep Going

What keep's coming in the way of me having fun and going to school is the police and drugs.

-Lil' Jacob

From The Beat: Sometimes one of the hardest things to do is admit our problems. You've done that so it's time to start thinking about solutions.

9-12-06

I'm in jail on my birthday and I's mad.
I'm 18 now and I'm glad,
so what
beat it's me Rush.
Ha…ha on my birthday.
Happy birthday to me
happy birthday to me
dang I know the staff is tired of me.
Haaay it's my birthday "smile."

-Rush

From The Beat: Happy birthday!

Hangin'

When Tupac says he hung around thugs in da street I can relate to him.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: How else can you relate to him? What is it like to hang around thugs?

Time Management

You have to know how to manage your own time – dividing it up between the block, your family and your girl.

My mama makes me stronger; certain people make it easier for me to see a better future with money.

-Wallace

From The Beat: So at the end of the day, you aren't living life for you. You have to believe you are worth fighting for if you want something to change. And if you don't see the need to change, then you better be ready to give your life up cause it will always be something – jail, death, looking over your shoulder cause even when you are free, you aren't.

Free Me Too

What would make me stronger and happier is for me Lil' Jacob to be back on the streets with some of my boys because they are all going to school and getting jobs

-Lil' Jacob

From The Beat: It's good to hear you have some friends who are on the right track. Your time will come so be patient.

Ready To Go

It's hella boring in here and I can't wait until the day they let me out. I'm in here for robbery. I've been in here for three or four days now and haven't talk to no probation officer or nothing. Hopefully a probation officer will tell me that I go to court tomorrow. Hopefully I will get released tomorrow and go home so I could try to do good. We just started school and now I'm locked up.

Well I hope I don't get to read this 'cause when it's in The Beat I'm tryin to be at home.

-Jack

From The Beat: Of course it's boring – jail is not supposed to be fun. We know it's hard to play the waiting game – not knowing what's going to happen when is torturous. Keep your head up and don't let the small stuff get to you. Focus on getting that second chance because it will come sooner or later. Remember how you feel behind these four walls so the next time you are faced with a tough decision, it will be that much easier to do the right thing and walk away.

My Sister

What's making me stronger? My sister makes me stronger because how she hangs in there with me and don't let me down she come to every court date and almost every visiting day that she can. I can't forget my mom in the rest of family.

-Lil' June

From The Beat: That's deep, the love your sister has for you. Is she older, younger? What kind of advice does she give you? What do you talk about when you're together? What have you promised her you'll do when you get out? Tell us more!

This Life Ain't Coo'

no this life ain't coo'
i can't wait until i get out
there are things that i need to do
things that i need to be doing
like making money
just doing what players like me do
hustling, gettin' high
just watching the days go by
try to stay alive
'cause i'm in this max unit
where it's called survival
and only the strong can survive
i want to be up out this place
because this life ain't coo'

-Fatboy

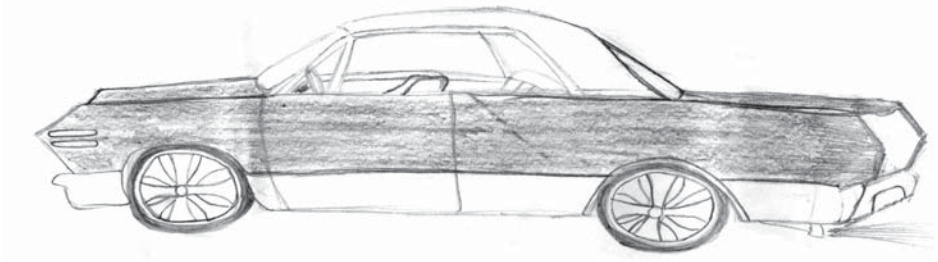
From The Beat: Take some time to think through what a player like you has got to do in order to insure next time out free, he won't end up with this same pain, locked up all over again in this misery. This life in here ain't coo', so think about what you do.

From The Beat:

From the beginning
Of life I've been
With you side by side
But as I got older I realized I wanted
You as my wife so
At that moment didn't
I made a commitment
And married you

-Lil' L

From The Beat: Don't marry too young, son, because as you grow up you may find the she wasn't really the right one!



What's In The Way

I think that nothing's ever in the way but yourself.
Basically your choices and your thoughts
because I believe that you have the power in yourself
to do anything you want to.
Nobody can make you do anything you don't want to do
because you should always have control over yourself
and you should always have your own will power
and nobody should be able to take that from you.

-Lil' Son

From The Beat: Great point. Why do we stand in the way of our own safety and freedom? You're a wise young man – keep thinking about it and share your theories with The Beat!

What I'd Like To Forget

Hi what's up? I'm not feeling too well for some reason. I am going through some stress right now, but what I would like to forget is when this lady had beat me to death.

What I mean by to death is when I am on the streets, what's always on my mind is money, money, money and I get what I want all the time; what ever I need I get it and if somebody needs some money I will give it to them because I was getting so much money I didn't know what to do with it.

Just to make it short, ok this broad that was so jealous of what and how I do my thing, it was nothing for her to stop me. So on that day she did something out of pocket to me so I am hella hot, so for what she did to me I come back after her. She thought I didn't have no gun because I was under the influence so that time I didn't care. You won't believe what I did. I had to pepper spray her because that's how mad I was and I damn near used the whole bottle on her and she came back and beat me with a bat. I was almost dead and I almost got paralyzed and that is something that I want to forget because every time I think about it, it reminds me of the pain but I am going to still survive.

-Lil' Bit

From The Beat: What a horror. This sounds like a scary situation, that you got caught up in, and when you look at the bigger picture, the lifestyle you were/are living, was the reason all this drama occurred. Do you think you could act differently next time?

Free Me

What's making me stronger is faith. I have faith in myself and I know that I will get out someday, not now but later. Something else that is making me stronger is my lil potna and my family. They help keep me up.

-Just Me

From The Beat: We always say that everyone has to have faith, be it religious, spiritual or just the belief that things will work out for the best. Not only do you have faith but good people supporting you so we know that you can do anything you put your mind to.

I Can't Go On

I can't go on —
or is it a mind game?
I've been lost for so long
But where do I go when it goes wrong?
And what do I do when everything goes right?
The door is open for opportunity but the door is closed for life
But what if I take the door to opportunity won't it lead to life
The answer is untold and questions are un-asked
But I must choose a door because time will still pass
I choose the right door next to left
But then I realize I made the wrong step
I can't go on

-Meka GU

From The Beat: If you opened the wrong door, you can always close it and choose another one. The key to the opportunity door is in your hands. You hold that key and also the key to life. Don't give up so easily. The only "wrong" step is the one you're afraid to take.

L.I.F.E

Life stands for Living Individuals Fighting to gain Energy
16 years for that shhh to kick into me
Step in my shoes and see that I ain't BSin' b
Yo' closest friends soon to be yo' closest enemies
Listen G, I took three, blades went into me
And if we ain't related you ain't no kin to me
And that real, I been there in that position
'Caught my lil' ninja slippin'
Relapsing my only tension, another day is what I'm wishin'

-Dre B2

From The Beat: Are you doing anything to live a different way so that you don't put yourself in harm's way? If your closest friends are going to be your closest enemies, then we suggest you change friends! Wishing for another day is not enough. Everyone who has paid the final price with their lives also wished for another day, but it wasn't to be. So, what are you doing to make your wish real?

I Need You

I want you now, I want you here
I need you close, I need you near
All my tears are shed for your sight
You're the reason the sky turns bright
And when it's cold it's when you're gone
When you return, here come the sun
Trailing right behind your steps
If I lose your tight I'll be lost in regrets
Without you I find it so hard to breathe
You're the extra essence in the air I need
They're envious to your beauty, envious to your form
When each flower blossom or a life is born
You're the fire that keeps me warm
My mighty shield to keep me from harm
It will always be just you and me
Living in bliss for eternity

-Mark B4

From The Beat: This is a passionate love poem, Mark. We don't know about "living in bliss for eternity" (we've never known any relationship to be eternally blissful), but we would like to learn about this special person in your life. What makes her so special?

What Makes Me Strong

What makes me strong and keeps me going is my son and my family. Every day that I think about my son he keeps me from going back to the negativity that got me in this place I don't want to be. My son is everything. He's the one who makes my day better and he also makes the negativity go away when he's by my side. He is the one who make happy when I'm sad.

-Poohdah Bear GU

From The Beat: How old is your son now? How will you deal with the new responsibilities of being a mother? What were you thinking about when you did whatever it was that gave the system power to take you from him? Were you thinking of him, or of yourself? If your son is not enough motivation to keep you out of here, what do you need?

Every day that I think about my son he keeps me from going back to the negativity that got me in this place I don't want to be.

Let Me Shine

I got fresh kicks
Fresh rocks (Diamonds)
and always stay with a dope line
and everytime I open my mouth
I stop you from sayin' what I have to say
Then I switch it up
'Cause my teeth are so shiny
You can see me comin'from a block away
and you know me young Money
I stay in a club
'Cause my money ain't funny
So I don't' be mad
When you come dating ya old lady
And I'm pushin' a Mercedes
'Cause I got crazy flow
But check this out
Don't be mad
When you see me in a club
And I got your girl
Droppin' it like it's hot
'Cause you know I keep'em hot
And you know as long as I'm on top
It won't stop
I'm gonna shine regardless
Whether it's from my teeth to my chain
to my rings.
And you know I keep it real whereover
I go
From San Franicso to Richmond to
Vallejo
And East Palo Alto
So I'm getting' hyphy
And I'm goin' dumb
Crazy Stupid Retarded
I'm in a party
Goin' off Bacardi
So after the party
Is the after party
'Cause you know it's my party
So after I sip the rummy
Mix the Henny with the EXO
Now you find one ridin' around in the
city
Ridin around in my Lexo
With yo' girl in the passenger seat
And she keeps askin' me
When are we goin' home
And I'm like I don't know
What you been told
But you're not comin' home with me
'Cause I got a wifey.

-T-Money, LCRS

From The Beat: This is one ridiculous piece T- Money! You have way more to offer than one bragadocious piece, glamorizing your drinking and drug usage and how the woman go crazy over you. Please. The time is now to step up and use The Beat to help you, help others to live a better life. What the hell are you teaching with this crap? Yo ugo back to these ways, you'll only sink further.

An Adventure With Consequences

Some of the smallest things can stand between success and complete failure. I'm from Sacramento and was just getting things straightened out. I had been locked up three previous times in Sac. and had done some good time and was ready to play it cool for a while. I still had two burglaries pending totaling over $100,000, but they were most likely going to set pushed under the covers with how good I had been doing.

That's when my supposed homie asked me if I wanted to borrow his new car for the weekend. I said yeah, and decided to take a few friends and some girls to SF to relax for a while. It all went bad when I bumped into the back of a brand new Porsche. Cops came and found out that the brand new Audi was stolen and there were tons of stolen items in the back. Now I'm getting charged with burglary, GTA, PSI, and driving without a license.

The girls I was with got stranded in a city 200 miles from home and the cops have all the reason they need to pin these two burglaries on me. This one night is now what's standing in the way for me.

-Wal B4

From The Beat: It seems to us that when you agreed to "borrow" your friend's new car, you had to know that it could lead to big trouble. These new charges may be what's standing in your immediate way, but there is something more basic standing in your way, and that is your casual approach to the law and a sense that you can do what you want to do. We're not saying you stole the car; we're saying that you can't pretend not to know what the possible consequences were for your weekend adventure, and until you acknowledge acting irresponsibly, you will continue to stand in your own way.

In My Way From Having A Positive Life

The things that are in my way to having a positive life is that I got a lot of enemies throughout the whole city. People dislike me 'cause of who I am and what I've done to them or they folks.

The reason I got stabbed was 'cause I did something to somebody and that same night I'm walking da spot with wifey and all I hear is just hella people whistling. I didn't really trip off it, but some ninja walking toward me with his 'hood on, so I tell wifey to walk behind me.

Dude take a ice pick out and in two second hella shhh happen. I take off on dude. He get up hella quick and tackle me, but little did I know he had just stabbed me. I didn't really feel nothing until I took off my sweater and I was bleeding. But I thank God that I lived, 'cause the doctor said if I was five minutes late I would've died.

-Lil' Nicoya B4

From The Beat: What kind of a God do you believe in? Do you think God spared your life so that you could continue doing the things you've done that lead to the cycle of violence you described? Do you think you are respecting God by the way you are living? Didn't God also create that "enemy" that hit you? How do you balance your belief in God with the dirt you've done and the dirt that's been done to you?

Realize

The Project is where it started. Baby born into sin,
Baptized, never realized how serious life is
Shoutin' and poutin' about the thing that were unlike him.
Slap! Realize it's time to wake up especially if you've been rapped up.
It's hard being a child that's being called a rape victim
Move! Why I need time to wake up and realize that this life is not my shot. When, where and why
right in front of my face…
I need to leave this place.

-Etta GU

From The Beat: Of course you will leave this place. But that's the easy part. The hard part is staying out of this place after you leave. What's your plan to accomplish that?

My Devil

My devil is my imaginary friend in my head. He keeps me company in my cell. We read books together, we play video games together, and watch TV together. But when I go to sleep, Kong is my devil. He goes to sleep on the floor.

-Big Mac B1

From The Beat: Why did you create an imaginary friend who looks like a devil? Why not create an angel so that your imaginary conversations could lead you out of this place. How long have you had this "friend" and when he keeps you company, does he talk to you? What does he say? What do you say?

Start Going To School

When I get out, I'm going hang wit' my people, smoke some weed, get me something good to eat and see my family and get all the girls. When I get out, I'm going make sure I ain't goin' get caught by the police. I'm goin' try to be good and school and listen to my teacher or whoever. When I get out I'm goin' start going to school.

-Marquis B1

From The Beat: The most important part of this piece, Marquis, is your promise to start going to school. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is for you to get a decent education. It's hard to recognize that at your age, but we promise that when you're just a little older, you'll see how important school is. As far as making sure you won't get caught by the police, we hope you'll listen to a little wisdom that comes from our own sad experience: the only way to make sure you won't get caught by the police is to make sure you don't do anything that the police can catch you for.

The Block Is Getting Hot

W'a's good with The Beat? People is in the way in the 'hood — not getting money, not going to school, to be on the block. Me? I get money, so I can't put myself in that position. But I got a few homies that's just in my way, stopping me from getting my money by getting the block hot.

-Chuck B1

From The Beat: We can't get too upset with those homies that are "getting the block hot" because it's very obvious to anyone with eyes that you are one of them! You're here (and you've been here before) which means you are bring attention to the block just be being there. So, you're getting your money, are you? It looks like you're getting it for the staff at YGC since you're making sure they all have jobs by giving up your freedom to the system. Are you going to school on the outs? We sure hope you learn that school is the key to your cage before you end up realizing that all your chances to make money the slow and sure way have passed you by, and your name has been replaced by a number!

In The Way

My friend is getting in the way of my learning an' my freedom because I end up doing stupid stuff like taking stuff that's not mine. The other thing is the block, 'cause I like hanging out all the time.

But the good thing is that I go to school and I'm passin' all my classes. It's just that I do the wrong thing and hang out with the wrong people. I need to think before I act.

-Patrick B1

From The Beat: No, your friend is not getting in your way, Patrick, you are getting in your own way. People will always want to lead you in a direction that could put you in the box, so it's always going to be up to you whether you let them lead you around or whether you start viewing your own importance in the world, and the things that will help you advance. Saying "No" — especially to "friends" — is one of the hardest things to do, but it's the difference between a leader and a follower. Which are you?

Changed Man

Being in here made me change because I been in here for 68 days now, and stressing like hell. I had three fights in here, beatin' on ninjas who disrespect. Holdin' it down for big bra. I'm going to either San Andreas or Sac. Everywhere I go I'm holdin' it down.

-Junebug B1

From The Beat: Just exactly what are you holdin' down and who are you holdin' it down for? Seems to us that you are the one being held down by a system that you've handed your freedom over to, allowing strangers to tell you what to do from minute to minute. You say being in here has made you change, and that you've already had three fights since coming here. So tell us exactly in what ways have you changed?

Wake Up

To me a lot of people need to wake up, including me. This life ain't no joke. You only got one life and you only live one time, so live it to the fullest. But me, I'm gone stay tha same thing, but to all who want to change, do it, 'cause this ain't tha life ta live.

-Baby Purp

From The Beat: You must know that nobody will take advice from someone who isn't ready to follow that advice himself. Why should they? If you smoke, but tell your child that smoking is bad, the child will smoke because he sees you doing it. So don't expect anyone to change on your word as long as your deeds undermine those words. There is one thing we agree with you about 100%, Baby Purp, and that it that it is time for you to wake up!

What's Making You Stronger?

What make me stronger — my dad, my friend. And when I not lock up, a nice meal or wake up in the morning.

-Jordan B2

From The Beat: We hope you get strong enough to find a way to stay home so that you can wake up to a nice meal — and to your family.

What's Making You Strong?

Something that makes me strong when I am weak is the support of my family. Even though I been in juvenile, I still been getting 100% support by all of my family. When I am down, all I got to do is get in contact with one of my family members and have a good conversation. Afterwards things could be better.

Family support is always better than any other support, because you could tell family members things you couldn't tell anyone else, such as if you had an a personal thing you want to talk about, you could count on family to have your back and not get on line about it, like some of your friends or female friends would do. That's why family support is better then any other support.

-DaJuan B1

From The Beat: You're lucky to have such a loving, supportive family, DaJuan. But were you showing them the love and respect they deserve by doing whatever it was that gave the system power to take you from them? How much help are you to your family now that you're locked up? How much has your mother sacrificed for you over the years? Isn't that how she shows her love to you? What are you willing to sacrifice for her so that she has the one thing she wants most from you — and that is you?

My Family And Reading Keep Me Up

The thing that keeps me up in here is thinking about my mom, my family, and sometimes just reading, that's the thing keeps me up in here. The things that keep me down is when I think how long I'm going to be here and when my mom don't come see me.

-JR B1

From The Beat: Do those thoughts of your family lead you to thoughts about how to keep yourself from being taken from your family and put in places like this? Do you ever read books that can help you move through school successfully and find ways to stop doing whatever is leading you here which, after all, is the real reason you feel down? What do you like to read?

Positive Motivation

A positive motivation that I have is to sav out some placement they trying to send me to. By the time I get out I'll be off probation and back at home. And I'll be 18 so it's really coo' 'cause I get to do all the stuff I've wanted to.

-Lil' Spitta B1

From The Beat: What's "all the stuff" you've always wanted to do? We hope it doesn't include the kinds of activities that led you here, but when you're 18 the next stop is not so pretty. What are your plans for when you get out of placement? Do they include school? We hope so.

RIP Monte

He was a money boy. He was da homie I had much love for him because he loved da young homies. He was good person. His killing was a mistake. But he put in a lot of work, for my block, but he was mostly about his money.

-Na-Na B B1

From The Beat: We're sorry that another young man has left the earth forever. But when you say "his killing was a mistake," do you mean that some killings are not mistakes? If he "put in a lot of work," wasn't he setting himself up for some serious consequences? Is there anything about his life or death that makes you want to re-evaluate your life?

Mom Loves Her Drugs

When I was out, a lot of things got in my way but the most thing was that my family, mom. Definitely she take my mind away from everything because I worry about her. She always on the street smoking drugs.

-Ray-Money B1

From The Beat: Your mom's sickness (smoking drugs is a sickness by itself and makes you sicker) has now affected your life, and that is truly a shame. When you're in a situation like this, it puts even more of a burden on your shoulders to do what you have to do — and stop doing what you have to not do — so that you can stay free, move forward with your schooling, help your mother and yourself. As long as you do the things that let the system put you here, you're not helping anyone.

What Do You Want In Life?

If you want to change what do you need? Do you need a ninja or a female? Is that all you need or is it just too hard for you to change? It's not going to help you. What do you want in life? You need to keep yo' head up and do you.

-Fat Rat B2

From The Beat: Let's turn these questions back on you, Fat Rat, for your answers. What do you want in life? Do you need someone to tell you to change and keep you on track, or is it just too hard for you to change? What does it mean to "do you"?

In The Way

What's in the way of me going straight on a positive path is the 'hood, like you feel me? That's a big thing that's in the way, my 'hood. I think it's goin' to take something really good to move that. That's my mountain I'm tryna get over, but I can't, feel me. That's stoppin' me from goin' straight.

-Jr F Baby B2

From The Beat: Do you mean that if you were not living in your 'hood, you'd be able to get over this mountain? Is it the homies that keep you from getting over? The daily life? What would it take for you to climb this mountain and get to the other side? Can we help?

In The Way

What in my way? YGC of San Francisco is in my way from living a positive life because I'm in here instead out there living a positive life.

-Daniel B2

From The Beat: But if you were out there living a positive life before, then what brought you here?

In The Way

I know that I can do good and I want to do good. But sometimes my family holds me back from doing the right thing. But when I start doin' something positive, something always starts to happen so I have to take the smile off my face an' I go back to doin' what I do best. But I love my family so I'm go die for mine.

-The Dude B2

From The Beat: But if what you "do best" puts you behind bars, then how can you call it "best"? And if you love your family, why would you die for them? Don't you think that real love requires that you live for them? How can you do that?

In The Way

There are a lot of things that can get in people's way: drugs, friends, girls, the block and all the things that come with it. But me, I got caught up in those things before too, but at these last two group homes I been in I've been my own worst enemy. I was just catting off and I ended up getting kicked out of both group homes.

I've been wasting a whole late of time, and now I have to go to another group home for 7 to 9 months. But this time I know it ain't no joke, so I know what I gotta do so. I'm gone just do it, and know I ain't got no excuse not to.

-J-Biggs B4

From The Beat: Well, we're glad that you've made the choice to do the program and get out. But we're curious to know what made you realize that you were wasting time. Were you not thinking of consequences when you let yourself get kicked out of those group homes, or did you just not care? What's changed now?

Life

Man, life is hard because it's a lot of things that challenge you that are bad things and there are good things and people chose between the both of them. But me, I chose bad because that's tha life I only know, so I'm gone keep holdin' it down wit' this street life.

-Baby Purp

From The Beat: As long as you keep "holdin' it down wit' this street life" then you can pretty much count on the system to keep holdin' you down inside it. You've already experienced just a little taste of the consequences of your choices, so if you think you can keep making the same choices without the same (or worse) consequences, then you haven't yet put two and two together.

I've Been Locked Up

I've been locked up in dis hole
For about three weeks
Missing my goons and da fams
That loves and respects me
The streets loves me
Dat's why I love da streets
I keeps it lit all
Day in the 'hood
I love my goons
And my goons love me
Ya heard.

-Jr F Baby B2

From The Beat: Yeah, we heard. We sure hope the love of your goons can overcome the lack of love that defines jails (from juvenile halls to CYA to state prison), because that's where your love of the streets is going to take you. And if you say it won't, then what's going to be different in the future from what brought you here this time?

My Family

What makes me stronger is being away from my family. Now I am leaving for 18 months, and I won't see my mom for at least 10 months. It makes me feel like, "Damn! Is this how I want to be, away from my family?"

I am not the only one in pain. My moms stay telling me how much she misses me, but now I ain't got no control of my life. That sucks knowing you can't do what you want to do.

I just want to be with my moms for a minute 'cause right now we stuck on old times.

-Lil' Sleepy B2

From The Beat: You're right, the choices you have made that have put you in such pain have also put your mom in a lot of pain. You have lost control of your life by the decisions you've made, and now you're feeling the sad consequences of those decisions. So how does this make you want to change the choices you'll have to make again when you are back in control of your life? What do you plan to stop doing? What do you plan to start doing?

I Need To Change

I have a lot of things getting in my way from doing right. One example would be myself, like me getting myself into trouble and bringing myself in here. Me being in here is slowing me down from doing good. Another example that is getting in the way is me keep hanging around the same people. I keep telling myself when I get out I'm not gonna kick it with them, but I always do.

-Jokes B4

From The Beat: One thing this shows clearly is that just telling yourself to change is not enough. There must be other things that help you to make those changes. Just like alcoholics need a support group for quitting, you need some support in your decisions to do things differently. We hope that you give yourself a real plan of action for next time you're free. That will give you a step-by-step positive list of things to do and to accomplish, instead of telling yourself what not to do. Give it a try; write a list of things you want to do in the order you want to do them, and see where it leads you.

Loving Mom And Dad

I love you mom and dad. I want to go home and go to school and be so good at school and at home with you mom and dad. I love to get out and came home with you mom and dad because I love you.

-Harvey B2

From The Beat: We hope you keep the promises you make in this piece, Harvey. If you have loving parents at home, then that is where you belong — and in school.

I Feel Like A Caged Animal

I feel like a caged animal in a cell.
It's almost like living in hell.
But I know it's a better way to live life by not coming to jail.
It's hard living out here in these streets.
We are not promised to live another day.
Because bullets fly and leave no trace.
It's so much going on in our communities today
It seems like everybody hustling trying to get paid.
But one day young brothers will wise up and find out
there's better way to live life.
Not staying out all night on light night hypes.
But what I'm gone try to do is do right.
Down Beat.

-Lgb B2

From The Beat: We know it is hard living out there. But it can't be easy living in here, either (or is it?). It seems to us that you have to choose between hard decisions, and since we know how much harder it gets the deeper you get into the system, we're hoping you figure out a way to make the difficult choice to stay out of here by not doing the things that bring you here. (Go back to school, Lloyd! You're too smart not to get as much education as you can!)

In The Way

The juvenile system can be in your way. Juvenile can get in your way such as if you're trying to get a job. When you're filling out a application they have questions that say have you been arrested in the last six months to a year.

Another way the juvenile system can get in your way is if you get a job or a job interview and you can violate your probation or catch another case you may miss out on your opportunity for the job.

-Young O B4

From The Beat: You're right, these things that the system puts in your way can make it hard to get a job and other things. But when you blame the system for violating your probation or for catching another case, aren't you blaming the system for your own mistakes? The system can only make it harder for you if you put yourself into it.

YGC Makes Me Stronger

What's making me stronger is being in YGC 'cause I know that I need to make different choices and be a leader and stop being like everyone else, and knowing that my family want me back home and I be back in one day. So when I get out I know what I have to do — be a man and not a lil' boy, plus go back to my girl

-D Stuzz B4

From The Beat: We agree with all your conclusions, but we need more information about the specific changes you plan to make in your life. For example, we don't see anything here about going to school, which we think is a very important ingredient for change, and for a better future. What are your plans?

The Girls Are Writing Me

This is young Enano once again
Wish I was sippin' on Henn
Coming out B4, wish I was smoking 'dro
Chilling in the halls calling his girl on my phone call
I got someone's girl writing me while I sit here in my
light green tee
I got someone else's baby's mama telling me she love
me
While I sit in here waiting for her to write me.
I'm out.

-Victor, SF B4

From The Beat: You may have all of their girls writing you, but look where they're writing! You can talk to girls on the phone and get letters from them from the street, but look around and all you see are other males. Time to stop dreaming about Henn and 'dro, and start planning how to live on the outs so that you don't give away your freedom, and any chance to hook up with any of the girls you don't get to see while you're here.

Have Faith

Life is messed up. Why did I have to come back for something I did not do? But life is like that sometimes. But when I was out, I was going to school every day, seeing my PO on time, always clean, did no drugs at all. But God have a plan for everybody. When I get out this time, I'm gon have to stay away from the people. But God make thing happened for a reason. Always pray an' have 100% faith

-Man Man B4

From The Beat: What happened to bring you back here? Were you just in the wrong place at the wrong time? If so, that should tell you that you can get caught up just be being with certain people in certain places whether you're doing anything or not. What do you think God's plan for you is?

You Don't See

You see me but you don't see me. Yeah, it might be my name you read and say, but it feels like it's not me. The things in life I've been through, the things I've seen, I can't even say. My life has been hell ever since I can think.

I am going to be 18 in two weeks. Damn, I have to change. Sometimes life is useless to me. To me I think what's life? Who am I? Why am I here.? Who loves me? Because once I'm 18 I have no home but YGC or 850 Bryant. To live is bullshhh. Yeah, don't ever go in the past because that's why I'm here, the past.

-Ms. AB GU

From The Beat: Life is precious. It doesn't matter how hard life can be or what you have been through, life is too precious to waste. What you have that people can not take away from you is all the things you have already gone through. You have made it through 18 years of life already, and they are probably the hardest years you'll ever have to live. So we hope you carry on, because you can change your future.

Like A Crutch To A Broken Leg

What's making me stronger? My family is making me stronger 'cause their love is working as a crutch to a broke leg. Me sitting in YGC is making my conscience stronger every daytime goes by. The love that people have for me keeps my body, soul and mind strong. Me living on this earth for almost 18 years has kept me strong since birth, Those are the things that keep me stronger and it's still making me stronger.

-Queese B4

From The Beat: You're lucky to have all these things that make you stronger. How is your conscience getting stronger? What changes do you see going on inside you? How will your next 18 years be different from those you've just lived?

Still In Juvenile Hall

Yeah, what's up Beat? This ya girl Rodnika comin' straight outta GU, Girls' unit. Yup, I'm still in here ready to get released. I done had like five court date since I been up in here. I got in here on July 10, 2006, and my next court date is September 13, 2006 at 11 o'clock in the morning. I'm hoping that I get released so I can go home to my granny. I been here since July 19th – September 5th, 2006 — two months. I plan on getting a job and getting into a program…

(To be continued)

-Rodnika GU

From The Beat: We wish you luck on your next court date — but since that date has already passed at the time we're writing this, then you already know if you had good luck or not. We hope that you will be able to go back home to your granny — and that you'll give her the gift she most wants from you.. not letting yourself be taken from here again! We know she wouldn't want to see you again in the halls, and neither do we.

Why Is It?

This really don't feel good.
How am I supposed to have a positive attitude
when I'm a suspect in my own neighborhood?
Every time I'm seen, I'm stopped.
They make a scene like I got popped.
They mad 'cause they can't find shhh.
I walk away like a celebrity,
but then I look at reality.
If I'm not seen they get mad
and ask where I'm at. Why is dat?
Something happens and I'ma number one suspect.
Now I'm on my way to jail, then I get booked
and they say, "Good luck, man"
but they don't give a damn.
Now I'm here and I call my people
and they say the 'hood is good.
It really ain't been no police
and now I ask, "Why? Is it 'cause I'm gone?"
Yes, probably that's reality
but I think, "Was I that bad or were they that mad?"

-Yung Bird B4

From The Beat: So, do you think the police consider you a one-man 'hood show? When you're not there, they disappear, but when you're there, they come looking for you? That's taking personal power to a new high! If you are the "number one suspect," did you ever ask yourself why? What have you done to contribute to this official view of yourself? How are you going to change this view — or do you even want to?

88 Days And Runnin'

88 days in YGC going strong
I'm not trippin' of incarceration, but I wanna go home
My mom, grandpa, uncles, brothers and sisters
Are waitin' on me
Friends, a girl, and a unborn child needing me
She three months and two weeks, and loves me
She's my all and I love till the day I d-i-e
Went to court a couple of months back, somewhere in early July
Got disposition that day, and it's September 5, and I still ain't left —
do you wanna know why?
Got caught up for some shhh up in B1 —
destruction of government property in the holding tank,
and smashing on enemies — to me it's fun
Y'all probably remember me from demon to angel eyes
Or that young baby brown eyes who is down for his Latino pride
Or that lil' savage who doesn't give a what
Or that lunatic who ready and who is down for his stuff
Preston, Chino, YTS, or the pinta is what I'm promised
When people bump they gums to me its nonsense
You say you a hard-hitta, or a quarterback
But I ain't heard of a factor from the 'hoods who keep on getting sack
Veteranos and cholos
Cruising down their boulevard up in a low-low
Lil' Shadow is back and for all y'all don't know
I'm back and so-called pinta bound

-Lil' Shadow B4

From The Beat: So you must be having a lot of fun surrounded by government property you can destroy and enemies you can smash on! And just think how much more fun you're going to have when you get to any of those places the system's built just for you down the road. More destruction, more smashing, and more fun! Oh boy! Write us when you get there and tell us just how much fun you're having!

We Love Pac…

My favorite Tupac songs are "All Eyes on Me," "Picture Me Rollin," "I See Death Around the Corner," and of course, "Me and My Girlfriend." Those songs relate to us and to our life. We love Tupac…We used to listen to him everyday on the outs, don't' get that opportunity too much here. But Tupac is the shhh! What up!

-Biggie Littles, LCRS

From the Beat: Tupac touched you as he did and continues to do for many. Thanks for sharing your favorite songs with us.

How I feel

Today was one of the worst days I had because when I wanted to talk to my grandmother they had told me no. All day today all I could think about was my boyfriend and my lil' sisters and why I couldn't come outside with the other girls. So every time I got to talk to anyone I would start crying because I would start talking about my grandmother.

-Dalton GU

From The Beat: Why wouldn't they let you call your grandmother? No one can blame you for feeling sad and crying because it's a lonely world in the halls. Did you finally get to talk to her?

My Son

So many thangs make me strong, but the only thing that make me strong is my son. He makes ma world bright when I'm in darkness and always turns my frown upside down. At night when he cries I tell him to stop crying and he comes on lays on ma chest on falls asleep. Ma son is ma world on ma everything and if I lose him I'd probably kill myself. Nothing will eva break us apart. Nothing I love you Lawrence!

-Lil' Miss Town GU

From The Beat: You say that nothing will ever separate you from Lawrence, but you are separating yourself from your son right now as you sit in YGC. Were you thinking of him when you put yourself here (because you did put yourself here)? So what are you plans to keep yourself from coming back to the hall? What will you change about your life so that you can be with your son? It's not easy being a parent, especially a teenage one, but it's even harder being a son without a mother. So we hope you do what you have to do when you get out of here to stay out of here.

In The Way

Something that's standing is my way of living at life is the death of my right hand man. This is standing in my way because revenge pops up in my head. And my life is negative until revenge is taken.

-Charles B4

From The Beat: If you think your life will get positive after you take revenge on whoever took your friend's life, you are tragically mistaken. Not only does that kind of revenge only create new victims like yourself (and another grieving mother) and put you at grave risk of losing your freedom forever, but it keeps in motion a cycle of killings that only the bravest of the brave have the courage to stop. Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that you are among those few brave individuals willing to stand up and say, "No more!"

Feeling All Right

Well, today I'm feeling all right, you feel me, 'cause I'm still in here. But it's okay 'cause I'm still getting visits from my grandma, aka mama. But my birthday on Saturday. I'm turning 16 years old and yeah. My next court date on the 13th and I hope I get out next Weds. But yeah, that all I got to say.

What gone be different when I get out of here is go to school, get a job, be a leader not a follower and stick with my family, go with my 1st mind.

-Darlene GU

From The Beat: We pray really hard that what you've written is true. We have heard so many people said what you have just said — and we have seen a lot of them come back. So what are you going to do that will make these promises more than just words on paper? Will you go to school every day? What will you say to the first homie that comes along to tempt you with something you know you shouldn't do?

Not Anymore

I used to fear for my life
But God showed me the light
It seem like I pray and it won't work
Man, is God really real? Does he listen?
I need an answer from somewhere
My mom's trippin'. I don't know where to turn
But should I just keep my mind steady on thee (which is God)

-Shanoria GU

From The Beat: We can't answer your question about God. Some people are 100% sure that God is real and that He listens. Other people are 100% sure that there is no God, and life is what you make it. Since both cannot be right, we think the existence of God is your own personal question to answer for yourself. But when all others fail to listen, when all fail to speak, and when there is no one you can talk to about your problems, there is always paper to write on. You will be surprised sometimes what writing can do for you — and for us who read what you write.

In The Way

What got in the way of me doing right when I left Walden House PSK was mostly family issues and financial problems. It's hard to do good when you ain't got any money in your pocket and you got hella shhh on your mind. And you can't talk to your old friends 'cause they ain't good influence.

-Mayo GU

From The Beat: We agree with you, it definitely is hard to do good with all that you have on your mind. But it's also hard to be locked up, so you have to choose between hard things. Did you try getting a job? The Beat Within's door is always open to anyone who wants to do good. We are more than glad to help. And there are other people and organizations out there who can help, too. But you have to want it. Do you?

That Song

I can relate to that song ("Dear Momma") because my mom was never around and ma and my dad didn't get along after a period of time. So I can relate because I went looking in the streets for love because I felt that nobody cared about me, and I still don't in a way. But I'm trying to. But it's hard just letting things go that really made me the way I am and why I do the things I do.

-Cidnee GU

From The Beat: It's hard to feel like nobody cares for you, but we feel certain that people do care for you. But the most important person you need to care for you is yourself! If you love and respect yourself, you'll find a way to avoid the temptations that put you here, and move ahead with your life.

My Mom Is Why Life Is Worth Living

First of all, she put me here on earth and raised me. It wouldn't be right for her to see her only child dead or dying. My mom is a very special person in my life. She been with me through thick and thin. She has been a very supportive person for me when I done been through worst jams far as getting locked up and what my offense where she stayed by my side, which I highly appreciate. Without her I don't know what I would do.

Another thing I'm living for is my life itself, because I have to learn from a lot of lessons and see what life's about and what I can get out of it being African American female, and what opportunity I have in life. Basically what I'm trying to say is I have a purpose in life, and it's to live my life to the fullest.

-Ebony GU

From The Beat: We appreciate how much you appreciate all that your mother has done for you. Can you live your life to the fullest and also show your mom the respect and love she deserves — by keeping yourself free? The road to opportunity depends on what you learn and will learn in the future to take you onto different paths, perhaps to places and situations you never even thought about before. Just keep being as positive as you are.

The System's In The Way

The system is in my way. It seem very easy to get in but hard to get out. Your PO tells you things like he really want to help you, but everything he do, like with his actions in court, seem like he's out to get you.

Like for example, you be out of your house for two and a half years. But don't forget you is in placement, someone else's house. When you get out and go to court, he say, "No, you can't go home." He's in the way.

-Spoon B4

From The Beat: We think the system does put obstacles in your way making it hard to move forward. But we wonder why you don't also include your own decisions and way of thinking as blocking your progress. After all, the system couldn't get in your way if you never gave them the power to put you into the system to begin with. And, since you can't change the system, is there anything you can change about yourself that will keep you out of it?

What Makes Me Stronger

What makes me stronger is being here at YGC. I've been here for two months now and I surprise myself that I didn't go crazy yet. When I first got here, I kept thinking to myself that I couldn't last another day. But now that I've been here so long, I realize that I can do time and it only makes me stronger.

Being at YGC also makes me stronger because all my boys, my family and even one of my home girls always be telling me how much they miss me on the outs. When the closest people to you tell you things like that, it can only make you stronger.

-Chi Frank B4

From The Beat: We think you're already out of YGC, so we're not sure if you'll see this piece or not. But we're interested to know what you thought "going crazy" would be like. What did you expect to happen to you? How did you expect to react? Is a it a good thing (or a bad thing) that you have now learned that you can do time? We worry that putting people in places like this can get them too used to doing time so that it no longer carries the sting it did at first, and therefore becomes easier and easier to do. Is that going to happen to you?

Tell Me Why

Tell my why I'm here
Tell me why I'm so mad
Tell me why people look at the past not the future
Tell me why people like to hurt me, hurt you
Tell me why my family does not come up here
Tell me why I don't love
If I do love, I love for the wrong things
Not for the right things
Where's the daddy I love
That I have not even gotten to see
Now I'm here
I now must love for the right things not wrong

-Ab GU

From The Beat: Only you can answer why you're here, just as only you can answer the question whether you'll come back or not. Maybe there have been things that happened in your life that lead you to where you are today, that caused you to make the choices that you've made. This is a very touching and sad poem, and we wish we had all — or even some of — the answer for you. But unfortunately, we don't, those answers have to come from you.

My Baby Girl

Hey Ari, it's momma
I'm writing you 'cause I don't want daddy drama
I miss you baby girl
Things just ain't right
I'm getting' out soon
And I'm gon get you that night
I remember the day you was born
You made my life worthwhile
Just 'cause your pretty face
And your big-ass smile
But if daddy don't let me have you
You know he gonna have to go
'Cause if he gone
I get the next of kin
But if I go to prison
You gon see grandma again
You know she miss you
And so do I
But all I wish is that I can tuck you in tonight

-Young Snow Biznes GU

From The Beat: We really have a lot of problems with this piece. First, you claim that your life became worthwhile the day Ari was born. But apparently that was not enough to keep you from handing your life over to these strangers telling you what to do. Whatever it was that led you here, it was more important to you than Ari at that moment. So what's going to keep you from doing the same thing again? Then, to tell your Ari that if you go to prison, your mama will step in — that's being selfish again, both to your baby and to your mama. We're sorry to be so harsh, but the most important job in the world is being a mother, and it requires much more than just words of love. The test of your dedication to Ari is your dedication to your own freedom. Without that, you cannot be the mother that every child deserves. Think about it.

A-Okay

What makes me smile is when I'm spending time with my family and making money and also knowing that I am about to get out because you have been lock up for 10 months but when I get out stuff is going back to the a ok and that is what makes me smile.

But what makes my smile go away is when you get lock up for stupid stuff and you get to the end of your program and men stared warning you about problems.

-T-Money, LCRS

From The Beat: How are things going to be a-okay? What's your plan? What are some of the warnings that have been shared with you?

An Animal In A Cage

If I had a chance, I get up out of here and do better in my life and stay out of the system. But I got to develop. Because when I'm in my cell I feel like an animal that lock in a cage.

-P-Nutty B2

From The Beat: There's really only one way to keep yourself from feeling like a caged animal, and that's to keep yourself out of the cage! When you say, "I got to develop," what is it that you need to develop? How are you doing it?

Very, Very, Very Mad...

I'm very, very, very made because last Saturday my probation officer came up to the unit and told me that I will be leaving Tuesday the 5th of Sept. instead of the 29th of August. I was hot for a minute but I got over it 'cause I'm like, "It's only a week. It's nothing. I can do that."

He comes Tuesday the 5th and I'm here writing in The Beat when I supposed to be in the group home. But no, I still in YGC unit B3, mad! Hopefully I will be gone tomorrow. Well, I'm gone for now, down and out!

-Ebony GU

From The Beat: Hopefully you will be gone by the time this issue is printed. Don't let your anger stand in the way of your progress up and out of here.

A Poem That Opened My Eyes

My Name Is Meth!
I destroy homes, I tear families apart,
Take your children, and that's just the start
I'm more costly than diamonds, more precious than gold.
The sorrow I bring, is a sight to behold,
If you need me, remember I'm easily found,
I live all around you – in schools and in town.
I live down the street, and maybe next door
I'm made in a lab, but not like you think,
I can be made under the kitchen sink.
In your child's closet, and even in the woods.
If this scares you to death, well it certainly should.
I have many names, but there's one you know best
I'm sure you've heard of me my name is CRYSTAL METH!
My power is awesome, try me you'll see
But if you do, you may never break free
Just try me once and I might let you go
But try me twice and I'll own your soul.
When I possess you, you'll steal and you'll lie.
You'll do what you have to
Just to get high
The crimes you'll commit for narcotic charm
Will be worth the pleasure you'll feel in your arms
You'll lie to your mother, you'll steal from your dad.
When you see your tears you should be sad!
But you'll forget your morals and how you were raised
I'll be your conscience, I'll teach you my ways
I take kids from parents and parents from kids
I turn people from God and separate friends.
I'll take everything from you, your looks and your pride
I'll be with you always, right by your side!
You'll give up everything, your family, your home,
Your friends, your money, then you'll be alone
I'll take and take till you have nothing more to give
When I'm finished with you, you'll be lucky to live
If you try me be warned, this is no game
If given the chance I'll drive you insane
I'll ravish your body, I'll conquer your mind
I'll own you completely, your soul will be mine
The nightmare I'll give you while lying in bed
The voices you'll hear from inside your head
The sweats, the shakes, the visions you'll see
I want you to know these are all gifts from me!
But then it's too late and you'll know in your heart
That you are mine and we shall not part
You'll regret that you tried me, they always do
But you came to me, not I to you
You knew this would happen, many times you were told
But you challenged my power and you chose to be bold
You could have said no and just walked away
If you could live that day over, now what would you say?
I'll be your master, you will be my slave
I'll even go with you when you go to your grave!
Now that you have me, what will you do?
Will you try me or not? It's all up to you.
I can bring you more misery than words can tell
Come take my hand, let me lead you to hell

If this opened my eyes, maybe it'll open yours.

-Pooh

From The Beat: According to the web site (www.drugs.com), this poem was originally written by a young Indian girl who was in jail on meth charges. She was found dead with a needle in her arm not long after she wrote "My Name Is Meth." It is a very powerful and accurate description of what happens when you start down that road, so we are grateful for you sharing it with The Beat, and also for acknowledging the writer.

In A Way

'Cause I'm a everyday hustla, everyday balla,
my money an' the block steady callin'...
That's why... my homies, my fams
block me sometimes..
But dey done playa-hate on purpose...
It's little shhh in life dat messes me up...
Karma, mayn...

-Crackhead

From The Beat: How do you define "little shhh"? If money and the block are still calling — and you're planning to answer their call — then the only contributions you'll be making to building your Karma will be on the wrong side of the scales. If being here is part of your Karma, then we hope you start hearing a different calling towards being an everyday person who can live her life as she chooses (within understandable rules) in freedom.

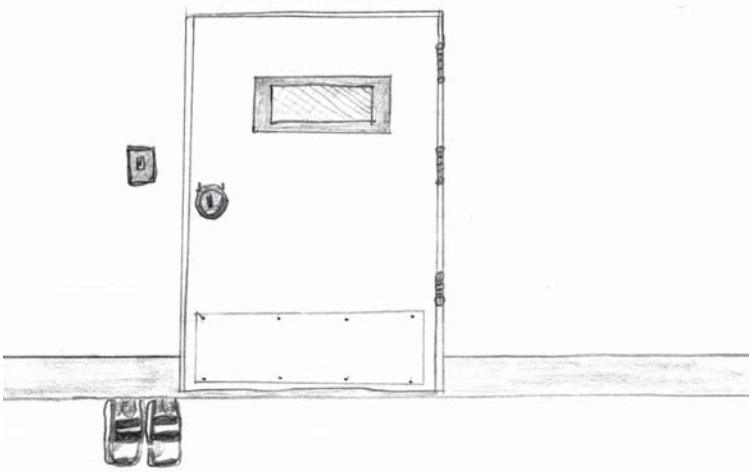
Heartbroken Over And Over Again

The love of pain and sorrow. With the untrust in y'all relationships. With all the heartbreaks I've been through make me be unable to let anyone in or me find true love ever again. All the lies, cheating and just whatever.

Every day I cry of what happen to me. I want to be able to love again. I be really hoping for someone else, but I can't do any thing about it because I don't trust anyone. So tired of my heartbroken over and over again.

-Doloris

From The Beat: You know, Dolores, we feel your pain. We really do. The "lies, cheating and just whatever" are things that we recognize about almost all relationships. But the other thing we know is that the next relationship (and there's almost always a "next" relationship, even if it seems impossible "for now") will go a very long way to erase these feelings of pain and sorrow and replace them with the other emotions that come with love, joy and happiness.



Just My Input

Prozac, Zoloft, Welbutrin, Seroquol, Lexapro, lithium... the list goes on... To me, the reason why teens are so doped up on meds are because they are always feeding into the media, hearing and seeing screw this, smoke that.

The rate for suicides has increased in the U.S. over the years. It's 1 out of 119 people, and the positive images that the media is giving off is decreasing. But that's just my input on it. Toodaloo for now

-Kalisa

From The Beat: We don't know what you mean when you say "just" your input. That's exactly what we want in every Beat piece, your input. So you think teen drug use and suicides are related to the images the media portray about teens. How did the media influen

Hurting

I'm hurting real bad. I got tears wanting to come, and that would fill up the whole earth. I can't believe what happened to me. I feel so lousy. I'm sick and tired everything that is going on in my life. I want to break through and be happy again. Somehow for now life seem it's going to be all bad. Right at this point, I feel like that I'm lost and locked up. I confused to point that I feel that my life has end.

-Doloris

From The Beat: The most important words you wrote were "for now" and "right at this point." Yes, "for now" you are confused and hurting. "For now" the things in your life are making you feel sick and tired. But you are only seeing a snapshot, Doloris, not the moving picture that is your life. Allow yourself to be confused. It's okay. Just absorb every new experience as your life moves forward, and learn from them so that your confusion goes away by itself.

What Makes You Stronger?

What makes me stronger is everybody's tragedies. Somebody else pain is my gain. Um, juvenile hall made me stronger. The streets made me stronger...

-Crackhead

From The Beat: Okay, we believe you. The harder they make it, the stronger you get. You've lived through a lot, so you have to be very strong. But strength is just a tool. You're not only strong but also smart, so you are in control of that tool. How do you plan to use it?

Beat Anniversary!

Mayn, it's a trip how y'all been around so long. I appreciate dat y'all even care... Every time I came in, it's reliable dat y'all come. Us cats look forward to y'all...

"Dear mama" relates to my life a lil'... wit' da whole daddy thing... So y'all young lil' boys, get da game up an' stop runnin' from yo' problems...

-Crackhead

From The Beat: Was that your daddy, a "young lil' boy runnin' from his problems? All we can say, Crackhead, is that it's his loss. That's excellent advice that you give to those boys, and we hope that they take it. As to all your compliments to The Beat, we appreciate them. To be honest, we love coming here. The Beat is like the people who discovered gold. The rest of the world hasn't caught on yet what treasures (and pleasures) can be mined here, but we discover nuggets every week. In other words, thank you.

. . . y'all young lil' boys, get da game up an' stop runnin' from yo' problems . . .

Thizz

Is what it is
So what it do?
Scraper on dubs
When you see us slide through
Uh, doo doo dumb foo'
Here and forever
Representing
Mac Dre all the time
Smoking that yay
So is Elmo
And keep it that way
And always crazed off the A1
So-called steak sauce
When I'm dipped and flossed
And that what it cost

-Elmo

From The Beat: Why the thizz? Why do you need to be representing anything other than yourself? Wake up Elmo, the time is now to worry about you and not get caught up in the stupidity.

That Boy

That boy always went stupid
That boy always had coo' fits
That boy always had clean whips
That boy got dreads that swang quick
That boy rock vans that go dumb
That boy is an animal
Wit' a thump thump thang!

-Henny

From The Beat: Who is that boy? Is it you? Does this boy stay out of trouble too? How?

Let Me Out!

Let me out!

-Angelena

From The Beat: No one could write what you have to express any more eloquently or passionately. But once you are out, then what?

Game

Game is coo' if you know how to spit it
If you spit wrong, man, you bound to get it
So get it right
Get it squeaky clean, tight
And maybe one day
You'll be able to dump it on sight
It came out smooth, like a baby's bottom
And it sounds so nice...

-Playa Joey

From The Beat: We suppose it depends what type of game you are spitting. Give us more details!

Home Is Where I Belong

My only ticket out of the system is me staying off the weed. I need to stop putting pills in my body. My ticket out is me doing my time for the crime I did. A felony is what I got charged with, for going into someone's house. I should of stayed home.

-Forgot To Sign

From The Beat: Well, we think you understand now. We think if given the chance to return home, there's a good chance you will stay as far away as possible from the system. What's your plan to stay clean off drugs and away from jail?

Keep On Pushing

Elevation, motivation,incarceration,
captivation, motivation,
participation,
in-separation equals contemplation
To revelations
Education
To the US nation
Youth in an equation
With no solution
Bring a revolution

- Jlee

From The Beat: So once there is a revolution, what will you do? Will you help make change for the better? Well do not wait, start now! Start now in improving yoru life! Life is short! There is so much you are missing by being detained.

Just 'cause I'm a black man

Pushin' 2Gs
'Lac an' mouth full of gold
And my neck and wrist frozen
Label me a drug lord
Supplyin' all
W'en I only slap
Some Mac Dre and some 2Pac in my lap
Dawg, money in the bank
Dawg, them hatas don't like that witch
This ain't the slave day
Use ninjas gone fight back
You fools could write that all up in the magazine
Put me on the TV screen
And am gone stay the same
That could call me racist black man
In this white world
Sucks seein' ninjas
Married to these white girls
Knowin' they the enemy
Can't never be no friend of me
That ain't nothin' but a freak show
You felt that what you need, though
While you off at work or somethin'
She mess with one of you people
Now you want to kill
Some pull off you an OJ
If you ain't got the dream team
You ain't winnin' you' case
Get up all in you face
Call you a straight house ninja
I know you press charges on me
Wit' my thang all up in you mouth, ninja
It's hard to maintain
This soulja like mentality
If it be a tragedy
White folk come an' hassle me
Slam me down
Just to put on handcuffs
Charge me wit' resistance
When they told me
Put my hands up

-Soulja Slim

From The Beat: This is no way to be a "Soulja" young man. You need to find a better way to direct your anger. Sure writing is a great way, but what you speak about is concerning. You may not like what you see and what you have experienced, but the only way to gain more strength is to go to school. Get yourself back in school! Read all history, write, ask questions and listen! The plan is to stay out of the system, and getting caught up in the system will only keep you down! Wake up!

Juvy Is Not Life

This was my first time in juvy. I don't know what else I'm supposed to do. This life is not right in here

For most teens, they think juvy is the easiest way out. It's not. Every teen deserves to have a life. Even though people may tell you, you don't have a chance, don't listen to what they say; have faith in yourself.

-Felicia

From The Beat: What keeps you optimistic? What will keep you out of here once you leave?

What Makes My Smile Disappear!

There are a few things that get me down and turn my smile into a frown: I promised so many people in my past that I would never go down this path. It's not too late—I can turn around and it's not going to be a frown.

I'm so sorry for those I've let down, but now I promise I won't ever see these walls again.

-Felicia

From The Beat: What will you do to find happiness? What is the plan to stay away form juvenile?

Juiced

Shhh, I'm hella juiced up because I'm supposed to leave in a week. So, to everybody in the halls or wherever, keep yo' heads up and try to stay out. Next time don't get caught.

-Juiced

From The Beat: Good advice to those you'll be leaving behind in the halls when you're free, Juiced, but how about recommending to them that they don't do whatever brought them into juvy this time ever again, or any other illegal mess? You're welcome to this advice yourself. We hope it helps! Good luck and stay safe and free on the outs!

What Makes My Smile Go Away

One of the things that make my smile go upside down was daddy at court. The judge gave me ninety days more. I'm eighteen years old. I don't know what I'm doing here. I want them to send me to county jail so I can make bail.

-Cuervo

From The Beat: You said that you were in juvy for a violation for a crime you were convicted of as a minor, before you were eighteen, so maybe that's why you're in juvy, not Marin County Jail. You may not be able to bail out like you'd like to, but at least whatever you were convicted of won't be on your adult record. Wise up!

Next Step

I get to go to placement soon
I been here for two months
I'm hella juiced up!
I'm is 'bout to do my program
And hurry up an' get out!

-D

From The Beat: What's the plan upon getting out of the program? Have a plan!

DWIGHT ABBOTT ***This is the second part of a 3-part submission by SunMan'sLight — Dwight Abbott. The first part of this brutal chapter describes his entering solitary confinement where he is brutally beaten by sadistic guards, and begins a "friendship" with the rats that share his cell! Here, he continues with the memory of that horror, made bearable by a rat he names Warden. It is not easy to read these experiences, but it is important to know what has gone on in "the land of the free and the home of the brave," and what still goes on today! Dwight's book about growing up in CYA ("I Cried, You Didn't Listen") has just been republished and is available on Amazon.com. Here, he is soliciting feedback about this second book. So if any of you who have something to say to Dwight — who is locked up for life in Salinas Valley State Prison — please let us know and we'll be sure he gets it.***

Consequences: Chapter 1, Part 2

I was startled when the flap opened. "How long had it been," I asked myself. "Two-three days? Maybe they'll give me something to eat? A little water?"

"Earl, what's going on here?"

"That there is Abbott, Warden. He messed up Mark really bad."

"I damn well know who he is, mister, and what he did to Mark. What I want to know is, why is he like that?"

"He messed up Mark, Ward…"

"Get over here and open this door. Bloom, you release the gate and then get your ass down here… How long has he been like this?"

"Shhh, Warden, ain't been but a couple days, ever since he messed up Mark, you know?"

"Bloom, you and Earl pull him out of there onto the tier… and take it easy, you ass!"

I listened as the voices seemed something I had imagined as I struggled to survive. "Could it be someone has arrived who may get me out of the fix I am in?"

As I was being denied food and water, my take on what was happening is they intended I starve, or die of thirst. I hold the belief to this day, it was not intended I leave that cell alive. Through the years I have watched as rebellious convicts, some not so rebellious, were taken to be secreted inside solitary confinement not to be heard of again until they died of "natural causes."

The hood was pulled from my head allowing bright light to flood in and blind me. As bad as it was back there, with the bag gone it felt I had never before breathed air so fresh.

"Abbott? How you doing?"

I felt what seemed a gentle hand between my bare shoulders. Had I not felt so bad, I may have laughed as the question seemed to me, under the circumstances, comical.

"I'm Warden Cupp, Abbott. There are now a dozen or so of us here with you. What I need to know is, if I have those chains taken off you. Get you cleaned up, are you going to give us any trouble?"

The best I could manage is a whisper, "Don't think I could do much if I wanted to, Warden. I don't want to."

"Okay. Remove the chains. Be careful; hold him down, but don't for God's sake hurt him, unless he gets stupid… Take it real easy, Abbott. There's been enough problems here. We ain't looking for more. What do you say we keep it that way?"

"Sounds good to me," I mumbled.

"Easy… Now sit him up."

"Can't feel my legs, my hands — nothing there."

"Get a goddamn medic down here, and you best move your goddamn ass, Earl."

Within five-ten minutes, my hands and feet were aching. As with everything else, I could not remember how long they had been without circulation. I was sitting up and it seemed like everybody squatting around had pretty much released their hold on me. I admit, I thought about it. "I could get a couple before they kill me," but I was just too beat down. "Besides, I gave my word to the guy I would keep it real."

"Here's the water, Mr. Cupp."

"Don't give it to me, give it to him."

Though I wanted to drink it greedily down, I did nothing more than sip from the paper cup, swish the cold, fresh water over the inside of my mouth, and then swallow it down with a newfound appreciation.

"He's dehydrated, smells, needs a shower and likely something to eat," shared the medic. "He needs some sutures. Those I can deal with here in the office. Other than that, best I can figure, he will be fine."

"Okay, cuff his hands in front of him and let's get him a shower, some clean clothes, and something to eat… We still on the same page, Dwight?"

"No problems today. Can't predict tomorrow," I answered.

"I can respect that. Get him to the shower… Earl, Bloom, the whole damn bunch of you, as soon as I get your reliefs in here, I want you in my office."

I did not see Warden Cupp after I completed my shower, during which I had to carefully soap over huge bruises and long, angry looking scratches covering my body. For whatever reason, I was to never again see him, nor another shower for that matter, but I did detect a slight improvement in their attitudes and how I was treated, or not treated, depending upon what angle one viewed the situation from. Nothing ever got the way it should have been, but I was grateful for any crumbs thrown my way.

Through the locked, barred gate that confined me inside the shower, I was handed clean underwear and socks. My hands were then cuffed, behind me this time around, and I was taken to a room in which the medic was seated at a table. While refusing Novocain — more out of my growing paranoia regarding what they intended from one minute to the next than any attempt at bravado — I allowed him to suture four wounds: One at the back of my head, one above my left eye, a gash in my forehead, and another across the bridge of my nose. There were others, not hear as bad, for which I refused treatment other than a bandage.

Afterward, I was escorted back down the tier. I felt eyes of the curious, and heard whispered words of encouragement from the shadows inside the individual cells. I sensed, easily recognized, their fear — fear I have been acquainted with al my life, kept me alive. What I failed to understand, nor could I bring myself to accept it, was their apparent passive acceptance of their abusive conditions and precarious position.

Inside the cell, before the light was shut out, I was surprised to discover it clean and dry. Even my blanket had been exchanged, through later that night I would smell the thirsting mold. Enveloped in the darkness, I understood it was apparent some things were not going to change while I was there.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I had yet to undertake a task any "OG" would upon entering for the first time an assigned cell. Methodically and meticulously, I began to slowly run my fingertips lightly over every inch of concrete I could reach. I was looking for a weapon or other contraband a prior tenant may have squirreled away. Convicts often manufactured weapons of metal or Plexiglas from "weapon stock" discovered somewhere inside the prison. As well, they would accumulate other small contraband items, such as drugs. these commodities needed to be skillfully hidden to keep guards from finding them whenever the cells were searched.

One ingenious method is to laboriously scrape away concrete from the wall creating a cavity large enough in which the contraband can be secreted. Once the item is in place, the cavity is sealed over with white, prison-issued soap that has been soaked in water to create a putty-like material. Finally, easy to obtain, a little paint matching that

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which was used prior inside the cell, the cache becomes invisible.

Should you know where in the wall this was done, the only way to find it is to know exactly what you are feeling for. I would spend two days searching only to conclude a cache did not exist — not in that cell. The prison administrators have been aware of this for some years now. "Inmates" with serious character defects seek favors from guards in exchange for information. There are few real secrets left our keepers have no knowledge of.

So began four and a half years inside that cell. I would never again be chained to hang from the bars, nor lay like a dog in my own body waste, but little else had much changed. From time to time, I would be given my "shower" via the fire hose after words were exchanged, and requests they "come on in" were made.

Mostly, there was a method to my madness, as the saying goes. Often I made unflattering and suggestive comments about their mothers because the stink inside the cell had become a bit more than I cared to deal with. They would respond with curses, and usually showered me. I suppose it could be thought of as a game to be played out. I had to be aware at all times, as some of them were really sneaky. If I did not have my moldy, rotting blanket up in front of me to keep the powerful stream of water from hitting me straight on, I would be hurt. I won some, lost some. As the years went by, I lost more and more the slower I became.

With each week that passed, the conditions got easier to deal with. It is true that that which does not kill you makes you stronger. The human mind will inevitably choose one of the only two options available to it in these extreme conditions: It will become sick and fall into an abyss of madness from which it shall never escape, or it will become creative, do whatever it needs to do to survive with the least amount of damage done to it. Either way, whatever else happens, every person who enters solitary confinement will leave permanently psychologically and emotionally scarred... or dead! There is absolutely no possibility they will survive unscathed. It becomes only a question of measure.

As I struggled to hold onto whatever I could of my sanity, there were different things I did that many, understandably so, would view, at best, "strange," and others would, again understandably so, label it as "straight-up crazy."

I had always been told that it's okay to talk to yourself, but if you answer back you are in serious trouble. Something like that. If that is true, one may — I suppose reasonably — assume I am totally insane, considering the hundreds of long conversations I held with myself, family members, and others I summoned there with my imagination.

Daily, I would short-step around the cell while acting out scenarios I thought up, stage-like plays: I was famous, had a great life; I was a hired gun known throughout the West. Anything that took my thoughts from the reality of what I was experiencing, I did not resist. I truly believe that the fact I did not resist is what saved me.

Though the first six months or so, I would religiously exercise over many hours each and every day. It helped to keep me not only physically strong, but mentally as well. Unfortunately, I was doomed to physically waste away over time due to the prison diet I was given. On a regular basis, rarely with exception, I would be given for breakfast a small paper bowl of oatmeal cereal and a half pint of milk. For lunch it was a bologna sandwich soaked in mustard with an apple or orange. Dinner was my favorite. It never got boring: Always fresh two slices of brown bread laid atop a medium-sized paper bowl filled with what I thought of as goulash. It was surprisingly tasty, and I believe nourishing, with its meat and assorted vegetables floating in a delicious, thick, dark gravy.

DWIGHT ABBOTT (CONT.)

Along with every meal served, a metal pitcher filled with fresh water would be left on the opposite side of the bars through which I would pour the water into my cup. All in all, it could have been worse, but I was to lose 98 pounds and most of my energy. Sometimes in the first year, I had no choice but to quite exercising.

I cannot accurately share how long I had been there — a year, possibly less, maybe more — before I made friends with one of the many sewer rats that would visit me at all hours, day and night. I encouraged them by attempting to always have food out on the floor. They appeared to particularly favor the apples and the meat from the goulash.

Early on, before I became aware of the rodents, it was my habit to lay flat over the hole as I urinated so that there would be no splash — just another of the fruitless attempts to keep my cell from stinking any more than it always did. Not being totally out of my mind, I got to thinking about the possible consequences if a rat took an interest in me about that same time. I took to peeing in an old cup and pouring it down.

Sitting on the floor, legs crossed, the back of each hand with fingers splayed flat on the concrete floor, a piece of fruit in the palm of one and meat in the other, I would patiently wait, sometimes for hours, for "a friend." Never did it fail that one of the rats would dart over my hand and grab the food as he, or she, flew by.

There was nothing that entertained me more. I could not see them, but I learned some were huge, as they would often crawl atop me and stand as I lay wrapped inside my blanket. In this way, I was able to determine many were of considerable weight.

At last, rewarding my patience was a particularly brave soul that began to take time to sniff my hand. I could feel his little, wet nose and fluttering whiskers brush whichever hand he approached before snatching the food and running off. Within days, he began resting his front paws on my palm and appeared to wait and learn what I would do about it. Soon, instead of drive-bys, he would stay and eat. I could feel his teeth harmlessly scrape across my skin.

One night, I knew it had to be him, he took to sniffing my chin, nose, eyes and forehead. I very slowly reached out and allowed to touch him, feel his coarse hair. Then he bit me.

"Ouch! You little bastard. What did you do that for?"

"Because that's what I do when people get too close."

"I can relate to that."

Giving no thought to the bite wound, I lay to sleep as I listened to the scurrying of many rats frolicking about. Suddenly, he was back! His whiskers tickled my ear. I had no idea which of us was more brave as I reached slowly out and touched the tail I could not see. I felt it stiffen and then relax when I did not remove my hand. Before that night's end, I was petting him as he nudged gently against my face and played with my hair.

Through the preceding days, weeks, there is no way I could have known if "Warden" would leave and then return, or if he remained and lived on the food I shared, which was, at the very least, half of my rations. What I do know is he was always nearby, and it seemed to me my voice would get his attention. I would speak and shortly he would be nuzzling me. of course, that could have been no more than my imagination.

Whenever the slot at the bottom of the door was opened so that my food could be shoved through, there would be just enough light allowing me to see my mouse's hurried scramble to get back down the hole. Warden had taken to

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DWIGHT ABBOTT (CONT.)

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running under my blanket and there attempt to burrow under me. For a long while — months — each time he felt my entire hand lightly across his back, he would wiggle out from under.

"What's wrong, little guy? Something got hold and hurt you?"

As I had hoped, there came a time he allowed me to pick him up. I found him to be heavy and obese. He was frikking huge — similar in size to that of an average-sized cat. I got to thinking he may have eaten himself out of any chance of escaping back down he hole, should he have to.

"Gonna have to put you on a diet, Warden. What would happen to you when they come get me and take me somewhere else? You and I both know they are going to do that, someday. They would come in here and hurt you real bad, and likely enjoy doing it."

"Hey, Abbott, listen up. Looks like we have a sewer rat epidemic in cellblock. Think you could behave yourself if I gave you a trap to put next to your toilet?

"I got no mouse problem in here, boss. I've not seen one since I arrived. If I do, I will let you know."

"Your call."

"Hey, asshole, you in there? I got your mother here with me."

I knew that voice but could not, at first, put a name to it.

"Got a little something for you to remember me by." It was the guard Mark.

"Man," I thought. "It has been a long time, piglet." I remained silent.

The flap was casually opened as I dove for my blanket. Just in time as it turned out. The blanket was nearly ripped from my hands when the water found it. Its force slammed the blanket into my chest knocking the wind out of me. from where I was kneeling, I was made to slide back against the wall, hard!

"You're going to die in there, you know that, right? Too stinking bad I won't be here to enjoy watching that. Adios, motha."

"Still sucking through a straw, tough guy?"

Afterwards, I sat and listened to his keys jingle off. "Well, things had been just a little too quiet around here." I stood to hang my blanket, understanding it would be a few days before it was dry enough to wrap myself in.

"Warden, I'm not so sure how much more of this I can take. It has to be over a year now, huh? What do you think, are we going to make it?"

Remembering it was a strong possibility Warden could not get down that hole, I began feeling around for him. "Where you at, mouse? You can't fit your fat ass down that little hole, can you?"

"You got your nerve calling my ass fat. Don't forget, I can see yours, convict."

"Yeah, yeah. Run your mouth, Warden. You know I had hold of your ass, and I know damn well if could see it when you walk, it would look like two wild cats fighting inside a burlap bag. Ever heard that one before?"

"So you're a perv, now, feeling me up? By now you gotta be thinking I'm kinda fine, huh?

My hand brushed against fur. It had to be Warden. I lifted him and there was no movement. He was dead. I had no idea how it happened, but I damn well knew when it happened. I had been standing when the shutter was opened. Without thinking, I had grabbed the damn blanket and yanked it up and in front of me, momentarily forgetting Warden always ran to cover himself inside of it whenever light was allowed into the cell. I probably shook him loose onto the floor, or he had been holding on for dear life and the water knocked him off. Either way, he had no place to go other than across the floor heading for the hole. It was then the water crushed Warden, or I stepped on him.

I sat down upon the wet floor and held him. Warden didn't feel so big any more. I could feel tears threatening. We had been together nearly my entire stay to that time, 18 months or so. He had been my friend, my only friend.

"I'm sorry, buddy, really sorry. I guess you shouldn't have trusted me after all, just like you first figured. I got you killed. On my skin, mouse, I promise if that piece of shhh ever gets close enough, I will hill him! You got my word."

So it was, a sewer rat had become my lifeline, had helped me to keep going. Warden caused me to understand that being "an animal," as my keepers often referred to me as, was not such a bad thing; much worse is being human.

TROY

We love welcoming new writers and readers because sometimes it gets frustrating doing this work when the beauty of it isn't recognized. Sure, it's ugly being incarcerated, away from your family, acquiescing to strangers that may even be younger than you, and just being away from civilization. However, it's a beautiful thing when people are teaching and learning through a publication that's as raw a voice as there ever will be in such a setting. The setting this next writer is writing from is Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA. His letter to us is a symbol of his desire to teach the younger generation. Keep sending us pieces and we'll keep publishing. Teach on...

To: The Beat Within

Hello greetings and salutations to you and all readers. I myself am a first time reader. It is good to hear the younger crowd say that they want to change. But what they need to realize is it's one thing to say that they want to change and another to do it.

Please allow me a couple of minutes of your tiempo (time) to introduce myself. My name is Troy Storts AKA Big Weasel. I am 24 years of age and currently incarcerated in the Corcoran SHU. I've been doing time since I was 11 years of age from Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall all the way to Slumar, Central, and Los Angeles Twin Towers

Just about everywhere... I've been to four prisons all through this term. I'm currently incarcerated for 2-11 in the 1st degree. I've been down a total of four years so I've had time to actually think. I'm writing this to show the younger crowd that I've been through the same stuff and I'm not happy to say that. But I'm tired of all this vida (life) this isn't for me. I'm coo

I see a lot of you youngsters talk about your "so-called " homies or fellas. When you're busted who looks after your familia. They don't care about you but when you get out and they see you they say what's crackin' where you been?

Are you guys really tired of this life? That's the question you need to ask yourself. I'm no one to tell you what to do but tu-sabes (you know)

You have to make that change within yourself, you can't do it for something else. I learned that from experience.

I myself, I'm short to the house after four years. It's time to get some "act right." I got to change for the better of me. I got to get straight with my familia 'cause they're the ones who care "not your homies."

I hear a lot of you say you do crime for fun. What is so fun you like going to "Juvi" (Juvenile Hall)

I'm sure some of you guys got girlfriends out there on the calles (streets) and you girls got guys out there

Do you like being locked up with your own kind. Not being able to spend time with your loved one? Well I will end here with that said 'till next time. I'm gone with nothing but love and respect. Stay strong all of you that are incarcerated and go home to your famlia.

On My Way To Death Row

As I sit and wonder where I went wrong in life, a smile remains on my face. Yet way down inside, I burn. The tears seem never ending once the lights go out. Sleep won't come; peace and joy seem so out of reach.

As I write this, tears and sadness are my closest companions. No more barbeques, club nights or them quiet times at the cantone holding baby close in my arms, while we enjoy a movie together. No more Solo Jeans, Nike Cortez's, or Charlie Browns. No more walking along the beach on a cool breezy day talking to dios. No, nothing is left. It's ripped out of my hand no matter how hard I tried to keep it in my grip.

Q-vole! Silent Sam here to let you know that those above-mentioned things, though maybe only a few, are the tormenting thoughts that go through the mind of a condemned prisoner, an individual with a death sentence. That individual is me!

On June 28th, 2006, the jury made a decision to give me the death penalty. It only took the Nazis an hour and a half to come back with that verdict. Yet, as they read the verdict, I saw something in a lil' señoras eyes that I'll never forget. It was that "I-didn't-want-this-but-had-no-choice" look. She was a lamb in the midst of wolves. As ironic as this may sound, I felt the same for her that she had felt for me — she was human, and so am I. It goes to show you that, just because we're all torcido, it don't mean we're animals.

As I sat on the bus, coming back here to my lil' cubbyhole — my cell — I watched the 45-minute drive blur by me. Vatos on the bus was talking about what they was gonna do that night. They was getting released etc. Chale, not me. I sat, every sense that dwells within me was screaming, "Shut up!" Who cared if they was goin' home or not? I'm not! Ever!

I closed my eyes and was woken up by the trans deputy. When I walked into male trans. the sergeant and ten other deputies looked at me with sadness in their eyes. That "pobrecito" look. Man, forget that! I wanted so bad to lash out at them. Pero, why? It wasn't these gente who cocked, locked and loaded my fate. Shhh, it wasn't nobody's fault but mine. They HPed me up, and gave me a 2XL set. Oh, gee, at least they got my size right. The good deed for the day done. Yeah, and they didn't down size me. (LOL) Hardy har, har, har!

(Hold on, it's chow time. Be right back… smile)

Ok. That was a complete waste of time and teeth. Thank god you ain't got to deal with this felicity's frugal gourmet menu. Today was "I-wonder –what-kind-of-meat-this-is" sandwiches, under-cooked potato salad, expired mayo, a nice thick piece of petrified spice cake and milk that should be outlawed. Serio! So where was I? Oh yeah…

They walked me back to my cell, and after they got their kicks looking up my ass, ("the standard search policy"), I was given my chow tray which was burritos and rice, one of the better dinners of the month. Pero, I couldn't eat. My eyes stung and vision blurred while my mind was still stuck in that courtroom. Time just stood still. My brain was screaming, "Move, damn you! Do something!" What was there to do? That's when my vecino in the cell over tapped on my wall.

"You ok, bubba?" he asked.

"Maintaining, homie. Tu sabes." I replied.

"Ay perro, I can't say I know how you feel. You gots to keep them strong bones of yours," he continued, "and if you feel that it's too much for you to handle, ask Dios for the strength to move on, Sammy."

Then I said, "God left me hangin', Dawg, them pinche…"

"Hold on," he interrupted and said, "God didn't in no way let you down. "You let Him down, ya dig? Nobody told you to mess them people up the way you did. Whether if they deserved it or not."

I sat there trying to sort all these twisted thoughts out. I wasn't trying to hear my boy spit real turica. As the saying goes, "A person hates to hear the truth." And that's how I felt with my road dawg tellin' me like it is. I couldn't allow anything to stump my rational thinking. "Composure," I thought. Yeah, whatever.

The hardest part of all was to see how all of this has affected my familia. For years, me and them beefed. To this day, not one of us knew what the beefin' was all about. Pero, gloria Dios, our relationship has made a turn for the better. Daily it's getting stronger. It took this tragic event for all of us to snap out of the stupid-ass petty trip that for years hindered the unity which could have, should have, and would have been. It's too late to turn back the hands of time. It's about looking ahead.

SAMUEL CAPERS ***Although our hearts sank when this veteran BWO writer lost his long court battle against the death penalty (he was sentenced on September 1 to die in California's death chamber), we are forever grateful that he does not live up to his nickname, "Silent" Sam Capers. The move from jail to death row does not, in any way, take away from the wisdom that Sam's experience has given him, and his passionate attempts to reach out to the young who still don't fully understand or appreciate what the system can do to them if they don't do for themselves first. Of course, we appreciate the props he gives to The Beat staff, but it is his advice to the young that we hope makes the biggest impact on our readers. In this sad, yet upbeat piece, he doesn't waste much time feeling sorry for himself or damning the system. Instead, he gives thanks to God, to family and friends, to his attorney, and to all of you who make The Beat Within what it is. The next time we hear from Sam, it will be live from death row — San Quentin State Prison — where he will continue to fight to have his sentence overturned, and where he will continue to spread his knowledge far and wide.***

(Smile) I'm sure many of you read some of my past pieces where I spoke about my family! Things have changed.

At this point, not much else is goin' on with me, except wanting for my final sentencing which is set for September 1st. And then it's a straight shot to up to Quentin. I'll be sure to keep writing for the Beat and with hopes to one day having a book published. (smile)

The reality has hit hard and passed. It's all about preparing for part 2 of this ongoing battle with the appellate courts. The show ain't over till the fat lady sings. She remains eating. I will not give up. I will not grow weary. Chales! Silent, don't ever give up. I'm too stubborn. (Smile)

Before I end this piece, I wanna send a shot out to the following gente. First of all, to all the staff there at The Beat that makes it all happen. Michael Kroll, my good friend, Sandy Close, David Inocencio, Allan Martinez, Manen Pau and the rest. You know who you are. Tu mi familia, Albert Sr., Albert Jr., my momma, Staci Gaines, step pops Leslie Gaines, brothers Antonio, Cub, Calvin, Kevin, my beautiful sisters, Desiree and Rikki. Tia April, primos Pico, who's up in Old Folsom, Josh, Jazzy, Tio Rich Sr. Tia Debbie, Richie Jr., Leroy, Mary, Priscilla, Becky, Gabriel aka Ulg-man, Reina, Sabrina, Julissa, Gabriella.

Also I wanna holla a Q Vo to Sandra aka Negra, Papo, Junior Boy, Chunks, Perico, Raccoon, Ositio, Trooper, Bunky, Ms. Fonseca for being such a sweetheart … (wish you didn't have a badge or I'd marry you, chi-aaaow!), Shawn Davis (stay strong big dog). A big thanks to my attorney, Samuel Saltalamacchia for doing your best on my defense during trial.

Most of all, to all the writers of the BWO, take a stand ladies and gentlemen! Keep them pieces flowing!

Oh, before I forget, I ran across a lil' piece in the 11.28 volume issue and I have a message for (with English accent) meenie, weenie, you need to start taking life a bit serious, son, or you're goin' to be in my shoes goin' to death row, with a weenie in your hand. Stop judging others accomplishments and downing their goals. Don't "hate" on those who want to make a change and don't pull down the ones who want to do good just because you're unhappy! That's really not fair. It's not nobody's problem that you don't wanna change. And since you don't want to change, which is obvious, or just tryin' to skate through life like it's a joke, then I will be sure to save you a cell right next to mine so I can remind you how much of a weenie you are for not takin' vida seriously, kid. Sabes, lil' homie? I say that because I care 'bout what happens to you in life. Doing time ain't cool.

[Ed. Note: We know which kid you're addressing, here, Sammy, and we hope you keep reading his contributions each week. He's actually one of the young people who's trying to use his brain to break out of the mental box that so many of our young writers find so hard to escape. Stay tuned… we have high hopes for him…]

To Jackie at Ventura, Mija, your soldier poem touched my heart. We all live lives of a soldier, pero, you as a young woman should take time out to be that… a young woman.

To Menace, I know what it was like living life as a cholo, Mijo. There's more to vida than puttin' it down on the calles. I lost someone very special to me to the gang life. When that life took her away along with unborn child. That's when I realized that the cholo life was a devastating blow in the face to me. So, if alls you know is gang banging, sellin' dope and sex, you need to sit back to take a long look at what's laying before you. That's life in prison and gettin' lit up. It's up to you. And don't blame how you grew up. I used to be you and now look at me. Por favor, build yourself in a positive manner.

So, with that, I'll close for now. The next time you hear form me I'll be up in S-Q. Take care and stay strong…

JEREMY TOWNER ***Like the first five chapters of this book, 'Con-flicted,' we've been patiently waiting by our mailboxes for this next chapter. And had we known what was to come while we were waiting, we would have prepared ourselves. This chapter is, by far, the most gruesome and troubling yet. Sure, by this time, he's had his altercations with his father, hitchhiked across the state, and has even been homeless on the streets of San Francisco. But none of those things hold a candle to how horrific this next chapter is. It begins with him in Santa Cruz wanting to see 'the wall' and being disappointed when he finally got to see 'the wall' and it was nothing like he expected. Then, like any other great novel, the story takes an unsuspecting turn for the worse. And when we say worse in this situation, we mean it to the letter. He's writing from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA. And this has been an epic story thus far, we're waiting by our mailboxes for the next chapter once again. By the way, Jeremy was once a steady Beat contributor from Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall a number of years ago.***

Con-flicted, Chapter Six

"The Journey Begins, And Ends"

Life is lived by all things. But the paths we live upon to death are all unique. No one person has lived the same as another. Though some paths look alike there are different stones and potholes to overcome. So who can say what one has done? Who on earth can pass judgment upon another if they have never walked in the person's they judged shoes. So our attitudes of who's right and wrong is futile in discussion. Until someone walks in my boots you'll never know me.

So with these words I give you my boots. The boots that have walked on the pavement ever since my last group home.

And I could tell you about my adventures, where I've been, what I've done, but it's all the same. Drugs, beer, parties that suck, fighting for my life, running from cops, hopping trains and hitchhiking, robbing people, sleeping with women, and on and on but the journey is always the same. Then when you think, "things are going great," something happens to you that you can never take back no matter how many times you wish it. Then you realize that what you were looking for was the wrong thing. Led astray we grasp at nothing in hopes of catching a hand of understanding from someone walking your path.

I fell from my path in Santa Cruz, California. It was the first time I've been there and I was looking forward to seeing The Boardwalk and what the street kids called "the wall." But when I got there I was disappointed because "the wall" was a three foot tall curb that high school kids hang out at and I never made it to The Boardwalk. One night it rained and my sleeping bag got wet so I went to the local shelter to find a dry place to sleep.

When I asked around a young man said he had a house that we could stay at in Boulder Creek but we would need to find a ride to get there. It was fate I guess because there just happened to be two homeless kids with a car who needed a place to sleep. So we agreed to help each other out.

When we got in the car we made introductions that I can't remember, but after those were done it was straight to business. Out of the two kids who had the car one was a woman and the other was her boyfriend "Eric".

Well, "Eric" began this path to a nightmare when he asked me and my newfound friend "Forty Eight" if we were interested in buying a gun for a bindle or twenty bucks. Not really liking guns myself I said no but 'Forty Eight' said he'd wait and see when we got to the house. All of us ignorant as to the chaos that would be unleashed that night sat silent for the rest of the drive.

It was twelve o'clock when we arrived at the house. After a maze of roads, which got me disoriented as to my way back to town, we arrived at a two-story house. There were no lights on and it was raining so it was hard to make out what it really looked like.

We all piled out of the car and headed up a small hill on the right side to reach, what I guess was the front door, and Forty Eight did a rapid knock, which I took for a pass of some kind, then the door opened and I was shocked.

There were two people already in the house that I had already met downtown after a beer party. I met them at a local church that was serving food to the homeless. I was really drunk that night but I remember them because they made a challenge that if anyone could swallow a can of mace then they would get a switchblade.

Never having had a switchblade and knowing I couldn't feel a damn thing right then I took them up on the challenge. Needless to say I got the blade but paid for it the next day.

And here they were standing in the doorway with weapons at the ready. The first thing out of their mouths was, "We thought you were cops." Idiots, we're cops who just happen to know the "secret knock."

We all went inside and were in the living room which had a fireplace and a half torn couch. Nothing else was evident except the kitchen. There were two rooms on either side of the living room.

The two people who were already in the house when we arrived was "Eddie Munster and Rush". Eddie and Rush were in their late twenties and were going out with each other. Rush was a healthy woman who could fight like a man. What Eddie saw in her was probably due to the fact that he was an idiot. So I was stuck sleeping in their room while Forty Eight and Eric with his girl slept in the other room.

We stayed up for a little while and were B.S-ing until about 1:30 in the morning, which I then passed out. Then I'm violently woken up by Eddie and Rush who where overly excited and they asked if I could bring in Eric quietly so they could discuss a trade for the gun. They wanted it to rob some store downtown before they left for Florida. Not wanting to interfere with their business I went across the hall and snuck into the other room.

The sneaking was easy it's the subtle waking up that was hard. Eric was out cold due to him shooting up heroine earlier that evening. But I eventually got him up and told him about the deal. We then both walk back across the hall or living room, and go into Eddie's room. Upon entering I see Rush looking for something on the coffee table by the back wall. Then I hear Eddie ask Eric to help her look for something or other and for me to shut the door. So I turn around to shut the door and out of the corner of my eye I see Eddie rush behind the door and grab a little league slugger. So shut the door while Eddie stands there and I knew something was off so I asked him, "What's up?" He told me to sit on the bed and so I did. Whatever Rush was looking for they hadn't found it yet. As I sat on the bed I watch as the most horrifying event unfold itself from Pandora's box.

Eddie walked over to behind Eric and raised the bat. In slow motion I saw the bat come down on the back of Eric's head with a sickening wet crack. Eric only grabbed his head in confusion and tried to stand up straight but the events began to speed up as the bat came down again and again driving Eric to his knees and eventually to the floor where he tried to crawl to the door. I could feel his blood splatter across my face and hands as my mind tried to take in what was happening. I could hear Eric's pleas for help but no help was to be found. What do I do? The door was blocked by Eddie and when I looked over to the window Rush was standing there with a knife in her hand. What could I do?

So I sat, flooded with fear and sorrow I did nothing. I sat there and watched and waited, hoping mercy would come soon. As Eddie swung the bat again and again and again until the bat broke in two. By this time Eric was laying on his back not moving but still breathing.

I could hear his struggle to breathe through all of the blood and his words repeated over and over. "Help me." Then if it wasn't enough Eddie grabs a telescope and began to beat Eric in the face again and again and blood began to spatter on the roof and everywhere else in the room. Yet Eric struggled to live hanging on to every breath. Then I knew that he would not leave the room with breath in his lungs. Horrified I watched as his nose was shattered flat and his lips split until there was only gums and shattered teeth. His eyes were stabbed by Rush and the most gruesome sound was when a saw on an Exacto Blade was used to cut across his throat. It sounded like taking a saw to the cartilage of some animal.

After a while the telescope shattered but Eric was determined to have one function and that was breathing. I hope and wished for him that maybe they would stop and let him go. Maybe they would realize what they were going and help him.

continued on next page

JEREMY TOWNER (CONT.)

continued from previous page

But it was too late. Their better halves of their souls were gone. They were demons answering to nothing but chaos. Feeding off of their work of horrendous murder.

That's when they realized I was in the room. I panic because now their attention was focused on me, which is something I didn't want. They talked among themselves then turned to me and said, "You need to prove you're with us or..." The unspoken 'or' had more meaning than what the spoken words did. I knew what had to be done and if it wasn't I would die.

So I got off the bed onto shaking knees. Trying to hold my vomit I grabbed a rusted knife. I then stood over Eric with an apology in my eye I leaned over and slid the knife across his throat. Then I threw it under the bed and stood up. It was done. A deal with the devil. My life to live for someone to die. I regret doing it everyday. The only thing I was thinking about was survival. My street smarts told me to just go along with it. He's already dead. That was what I was thinking. The only logic I could think of. I could die but I didn't want to die. Not like that. So much we value our own lives but can care less of another's.

I felt abandoned and lost. I wanted to go home but I knew we'd get caught so I couldn't go home. Then I would run because I didn't want to go down for something I had no control over.

I helped Eddie then to carry the body downstairs into a basement where I watched Eddie wrap the body in a tarp. Then as if he hadn't enough he picked up a cinder block and dropped it on Eric's head three times. I couldn't take it anymore and I puked.

After we went upstairs, I helped to try to clean up but it was useless. When I looked at the wall there were bits and pieces of hair on flesh, skull bone and a grey jelly matter stuck to the wall. Madness has its mess.

I prayed then. Without realizing it I prayed. I sought forgiveness but I wouldn't find it until later.

We sat quietly in Eddie's room for a couple of hours. Then Eddie and Rush started talking about leaving and how they would need a car. Then they said they would take the girl's car but they would have to kill her too. I couldn't let that happen so I talked them out of it. Saying I would tell her something she would believe. She would ask where her boyfriend was and I would lie. It was all I could think of but they agreed.

We waited until morning without sleeping and when I heard Forty Eight get up, I packed my stuff and left the room. I met Forty Eight and the woman was in the living room. She asked me where her boyfriend was and I told her he went downtown to score some dope. She bought it but the way she looked at me made me feel like she knew and she was scared. I felt deep regret for her and yet glad she was alive.

So then me, Forty Eight, and the woman got into the car and drove back to town. I made plans with Forty Eight to go to Texas where I had a friend. The last I saw of the girl was when she drove off the street after dropping us off downtown at "the wall." Standing there watching her drive off I knew it was only a matter of time before I hit the bottom of the pit to hell. May God have mercy on us all.

ALEX SHELTON

Our very own talented artist is back on the scene after a couple of weeks of being MIA. This week he doesn't hit us with a piece he's illustrated, but he does illustrate a piece for us with his words. No matter what we've done, or how hard people make us out to be, one thing remains universal and that's the fact that everyone needs love. It sounds kind of corny, but tell that to the kid who's family has abandoned him because of their frustration with his constant brushes with the law. Or to the man who's been locked up for most of his life, never having a chance to build something romantic with anyone. Well, with Alex, he's posing the question of, "Where are you at?" to what seems like no one in particular, but it's evident that like the rest of us, he's looking for that special someone he can share a life of love with — very touching. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA, and hopefully fate will give him someone to love in the near future.

My Queen, Where Are You At?

Lucky charm here once again
Slingin' this magical fine point pen
From this dark ancient dungeon to create this dialectic poem
By candlelight — exclusively — for a queen
Who perhaps holds a love supreme
Like this tranquility king
I reach out my hands with all the love in the world
To black, brown and white
Who keep it tight
An ecstatic delight
Walk with me hand in hand
I want to express my vivid love with a blaze of compassion
Thru this castle gate
With your one and only royal mate
When I look into your eyes all I will see is a gift from "God"
'Cause my soul is in union with him so I don't discriminate on no one
I want a real woman with a real good heart and impure solitude
A good attitude...
"Where you at my queen?" My resume is clean
I possess the capacity to live by Gods' rules and instructions
I'm simple and content
My renewal is complete and my spirit is ready to shine
With eternal light excelling a spotless mirror of doing things
With an image of excellence, a heaven sent!
These echoing slogans are for you
The Queens who have the realistic respect total appreciation
For a King, I truly believe a woman who had reached maturity,
Self-control, creativity, and likewise, admiration
To this king these are all qualities-"Amen"- my universal love and affection will only make me stronger 'cause I can accept and understand a woman's moods and feelings on all levels
I will most definitely keep a "smile" on that precious face
A sense of humor in place
Your "faithful" heart beating at a pace!
You don't have to wonder where my mind is at
I'm gentle, non-abusive, patient.
I'm never jealous or possessive ain't got the time
To trip on the small things — like doubting
Or careless shouting!
I've learned how to live a righteous life by "Gods" word
So the standards will be clearly recognized
My queen and I sympathized with an exclamation mark
Like a skylark!
The word "temptation" is nonexistent to me
My lovely!
To be more precise:
I want to live happy and peaceful
And receive the "Blessings" of a "Fruitful" life
Married to a perfect wife!
Bringing up children in a healthy productive environment
And a "strong" family relationship
I'm universal so don't trip!
"My queen where you at?"
I give you this rose
My sweet heart 'till we meet I have to close
My candle is getting low
So I must go
Another lonely light in this dark ancient dungeon 'till it's time to parole
Your loving king is right here
My Queen where you at, my dear!

FRISKIE ***This next writer needs no introduction but we're going to give her one anyway. One our most favorite poets and a true survivor of many things, we give you a name that if you don't know, you need to... Friskie. She has a way with words that's incredible for her age and more experiences to talk about than virtually anyone we know. For a minute she was even working in our office, but unfortunately a frustrating turn of events brought her back to the very same place she's learned to dread all these years. We hope she's working on what she needs to in order to get out and stay out this time. She's currently writing from the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility (a Y.A. institution) in Camarillo, CA. Keep coming with these great poems. You know we love hearing from you.***

Think And Do

Fruitful thoughts, positive outcome
It's not always fun
Easy is what it's not
But I gotta get this job done
Be nice, think precise live learn
Don't get burned
Become respected,
Nurture the neglected
Be a woman of honor and class,
Not a piece of ass
Smoking out a pipe made of glass
That shhh's all trash
I'm guna shine my light so bright
A beautiful sight I'm gon' be livin' right.

Make It Right

Page after page I write
Down my thoughts
About the feelings I have not forgot
Never have, don't know if I will
I am the only one that can
Fix this because there ain't no magic pill
Mentally ill
Memories give myself the chills
No more thrills
I'm guna make it
Ain't no more faking it
I'm guna do this shhh real
Like a boss
At all costs
I need to get better
Be stable through rain and shiny weather
I'm guna make it right
This time.

Far Away

So far away, and yet so close
Hurting so much just like most
Far away from real life
So close to insanity
From my grief and strife
So far away, hope is outta sight
I'm struggling to shine my little light
I wish I could shine like the stars, so bright
But I'm tired of having to fight
The darkness keeps pulling me down
But I know how to turn a frown upside down
So much practice at putting on a mask to hide my naked face
Where signs of misery you can visually trace
I'm so far away from reality, I feel like I'm in outer space
I sound like a nut case
But I'm hurting deeply
I' d rather live in a dream,
That's why I stay sleepy
I don't want to be on my own
Because I'm scared of being alone
I can't trust myself, so I have to trust someone else with my life
Because my decisions are never right
I'm burning out my own light
So empty I can't survive
I'm so far away from life...

Beauty The Beast

Eyes of glass
Gyrl with ass
In tha world get's passed
As having it all
A sultry smile
Makes you want to stay
For a while
Long Talon nails
Full lips — she prevails
Eyes so glossy and clear
You can't even see the tears
Beautiful skin, cellulite free
Lovely things truly indeed
Full perky breasts that steal your attention
Back so sensual, you can't even mention
But her body's tight with tension
Her hearts as cold as ice
Your feelings she will sacrifice
Just to get what she wants
Her tongue teases and taunts
Watch out, she lethal.

The System In My Eyes

Never at peace
Devastation to say the least
When the parole board denies our release
Can't get a hold of family
I wish they would stop rejecting me
A couple letters aren't enough
I need my mothers and brothers loving touch
I don't miss my other freedoms that much
I was institutionalized by age thirteen
It sounds obscene
My first trip to juvenile was age 9
Ever since then incarcerations been going fine
I've been battling addiction for the last six years
Over this period, I've increased the numbers of my fears
A child's mind that's been exposed
And underneath my clothes,
There's a body that's been exploited
A fingers been pointed
I take the blame
I feel the shame
For those who know me
You know my writing
For those who know my pain
Reading this is like a ghost sighting
So I say welcome to the world
Of this sixteen year old girl
My name is Kristen
So open your ears and listen...

Life

Live, learn, touch, breathe
Feel, love, pain, bleed
Hate, forgive, burn, read,
Forget, heal, anger, need
Think logical be consistent
Think rationally, be independent
Death, think, strife
Loathe, lust, reach, life
Like, make, shine, fight
Die, tender, living, light
Think assertive, be understanding
Think realistic, be undemanding
Live, learn, touch, breathe
Forget, heal, anger, need
Think, death, hurt, strife,
Die, tender, living life.

Can't Fight It

I can't fight it no more
My hearts finally hit the floor
I can't fight it I'm done
It's over they won
Livin' a life with too many struggles
Always alone with no one to cuddle
I just want to hide from society
So that no one can ever know me
I'll just live my life like a trophy
And I'll let these bars hide with me
I can't fight it — not again
My spirits been broken just like them
I just lost a good friend
I can't fight it
I can't hide it
this obsession is getting deep
Like the hills in the L's hella steep
I'm a beautiful girl
with an ugly heart
The seed of a rose
That couldn't grow
Because I was kept in the dark
Don't get me started
My hearts been hardened
My life like an abyss
So enter if you wish
I can promise you,
Never again will you ever prosperity or bliss
So I'm gonna end that like this.

I can't fight it I'm done
It's over they won
Livin' a life with too many struggles
Always alone with no one to cuddle

Magic

Amazing love
Let go too soon, you're still on my mind.
Making me swoon
You hurt me, I hurt you but we could've worked it through
You left me I wanted to hate you
You set me free, I despise you.
With so much love, my angel from above
We numb the pain caused by each other
With drugs no more kisses or hugs
Pain, too strong for too long and yet I'm staying sane in the rain
I bent over backwards, but I'm not broken
Many friends to turn to DC, Frisco, and Oakland
But every time I hear those love songs it kind of just breaks me down.
To where I frown,
When I'm all alone
Feeling cold growing old.
16 yrs. into this life
You gave me more than heartache and strife
You taught me how to love people right
I miss you holding me at night
You're still on my mind even out of sight
I miss you so much it's tragic
Baby I can't live without the magic...

FRISKIE (CONT.)

Wanted

Fear, loneliness, confusion and pain
Purposely drowning myself in the rain
All I can do is sleep, because my soul is weak,
If I open up my mouth to speak,
I would just make a mess of my words and vowels,
I hear these noises in my head – screaming louder than bells,
I just want to hurry up and die
Sometimes that's easier than having to cry
Well no, I don't want to tackle death,
I just want to feel numb,
I may sound dumb, but I know somewhat bright,
I feel like darkness trying to hide from the candles light
I am the soul the devil seeks,
So give me over, instead of playing hide and seek,
He wants my blood to be spilled,
That beautiful red color give your skin the chills,
Into the casket, here I will lay going down into the dirt,
It's a beautiful day.

Locked Up — Not Shut Up

Four walls, two cement, two bricks
Each wall about three inches thick
Supposedly crazier than Hannible
They keep us caged up in here like animals
Try to breathe the air full of dust
Down the hall – the smell of must
This is the CYA system
Prison – it's full of contradictions
They say it's about rehabilitation
But all the staff are too impatient
Forgetful tendencies lead to staffs inconsistencies.
Doing time in this perverted system
It's hard – you scream but no one wants to listen
Tension building I want to explode
Too much stress – I'm now on overload
Denied parole – once again I lost control
Nobody sees the true person that I am
Lost in this society, where is it that I stand?
My minds capacity is becoming
filled with images of loneliness
I'm trying to seek God and his holiness
I looked in the wrong place
because here I sit and stare the devil in the face
Then I open my eyes
And I'm stepping out of these razor wire gates
Take a new turn, I'll leave the rest up to fate.

Let Go

I let go of you.
Baby I didn't want to
But that's what I needed to do
To get over the love we shared
It seemed so real like you really cared
Oh boy it's hard for me to say
But ya' best be on your way
Don't look back
Matter of fact
Don't ever remember
The memories I used to treasure
Your name is not to pass my lips
Nor mine yours
That way nobody stumbles, nobody trips
I finally let go, now I'm free to take my pick
I let go of you,
Baby because there's nothing left to hold on to
Just let go and move on.

RUBEN ***We have known Ruben for a while now. He has been a brilliant writer in our workshops over the years when he has stepped up to the plate. This go round he definitely has done just that, where he writes us from a juvenile correctional facility south of San Francisco. This young man has a gift and we hope he continues to shed light on us readers of The Beat as he takes his steps in finding freedom. We are pulling for Ruben to move beyond the system and find total happiness. We know it is not going to be easy, but we know at this time he is more than determined to be more than a number. We have hope and we hope he doesn't forget us, as he continues to share with us his journeys.***

A Life Of A Normal Person

August 26th, 1988, a baby boy was placed here on Earth. His mother, Sabrina, and father, Ruben, were the ones who announced his name would be Ruben A. O.

As I sit here during school on a Wednesday, I reflect on my life, and with support, I chose to write about my life. This is not to make an image of me. It's only to share with you what I've been through in my 18 years of life. I'm not a good writer, but I hope in some way, you can relate to my ways of living.

As my early years of a young mind, I was raised by my father's side. Big Ruben, my dad's father (who spent seven years in San Quentin) and his wife, my grandmother Jessie (who was a mule for my grandfather while in prison; a mule is usually a female who smuggles drugs into prison). Being raised by/with my grandparents was normal to a young child with no knowledge of what my parents were doing. I had no clue. Both parents decided to live life without me.

As of the age of me remembering things, I can recall being showered with love (lots of presents for the holidays). I was getting older and it was time for school. I went to Cesar Chavez Elementary every morning, each year. The time came when I was able to walk and wander the streets of my journey. That was only about a three-minute distance to school and home. This was a big step for me, but to my grandfather, it was feelings of worry (Imagine a 300-pund man, sleeved down that had no fear that anybody recognized, worried to death his baby boy wouldn't come home)?

Elementary for me was "the coolest thing" back then. I have to admit, I was attracted at a young age to the opposite sex. At the age of 10, I was the kid everyone was cool with. Everyone in 5th grade is cool, so I was normal for the most part. In the last year of Cesar Chavez, which was 5th grade, I was awaiting the hype and rumors of junior high (Lee Mathson Jr. High). The day came after the long summer of shopping for uniforms. Junior High was nothing really. 6th grade came and went until the day I chose to engage in a fist fight that had the outcome of me ending up in the Hall (here's where I started my criminal behavior). I was released in about ten hours, then was placed on informal probation. My father was shocked and started to "try" to become a father.

As I lived with him, I saw a person who bought me materialistic things in exchange for him being an alcoholic and a drug-dealer. I saw the hand motions he would do when he was selling whatever product the drug users were buying. During this time, I started to get anger inside and this brought numerous visits to the Hall. Little did I know, those times would get me accustomed to living my "entire youth" in the system (I've been out 37 days the longest in the five years in the Juvenile Justice System).

Living with my father brought anger, so I was in and out until the last semester of 8th grade. I attended Peter Burnett in the south bay. That didn't last long. I was charged with assault and came back to the place I knew so well. 30 days, I was back out and enrolled in Pala Middle School. I graduated to house arrest. During that time, I decided to leave my father's due to constant fist fights (so I carried a burden still till this day). I moved in with my mother and it was chaotic there also. My mother was deeper and deeper into her addiction, which was alcohol (which is the devil's cousin) but who could blame her?

She was very poor, due to her mother, Josephine, being a heroin addiction (which later killed her). Her addiction affected all of her kids, all four sons and two daughters. Her addiction left my mother to become the role of mother hen. Sabrina was the outcast. She had really only two uniforms going to school, so you could assume she had low self-esteem, plus she was molested at a young age by her mother's boyfriend. Her father was nowhere to be found because he was murdered. My mother fended for herself and was struck by love at a very young age with a known gang-member Larry (who was fresh out of C.Y.A. Being vulnerable led to attachment, but that was over due to Larry being murdered (word was he was killed by older homeboys in the pen. Due to selling drugs and not paying rent) so she moved and eventually met my father. Both came from broken homes and enjoyed doing drugs and also selling (also at an age I'm not aware of and really don't care) so back to my story. So, I understood she was going through it. At the same time, the alcohol brought up visions of the past, so she became angry, and so I was due to not having a family. We both had numerous fights and that was over quickly. I was locked up and sentenced to the Ranch. I ran on and out. I was infatuated with the excitement of being on the run.

During that time, I was starting to associate with gang-members. Then, I was fully reppin' and was jumped into my 'hood. The time came and I was given the placaso (nickname) of "S" by a homeboy who is facing a double life sentence. Being on the run was fun, but it came to an end. I was apprehended and back to the Hall (my home). During my time, I was starting to see the change in my attitude. I was out in 120 days and I had been curious to start high school (At 13 years of age, I had started experimenting with different kinds of drugs). So, I went and started Independence High School (when I say I went, I mean to smoke and drink). There, I was approached by the homeboys from the 'hood and was given the current news on what I was missing while in the Hall. The 23 days there, I met a lot of beautiful women, but I met one that stood out like a sore thumb. I didn't know she would be my baby's momma.

Her name was Jessica. She was involved with another vato (dude) so I stood my distance at the time, not wanting to pursue the subject with too much gangsta shh. The time came and I was too involved with the gang to appreciate a beautiful female such as herself. I was locked up for some stupid shhh. It wasn't nothing because the classes in high school were too hard anyway (only because the education here isn't helping us in any way). So, I repeated the cycle once again. This time, for longer for threatening a vato I thought was my right-hand man, but he felt envy and jail is where I went. Back came the Ranch and I completed 150 days. I was plotting revenge and never had the chance too. I was out and went to my old stomping grounds and there she was, more beautiful than I remembered, so after awhile, the lovey-dovey, cupcake, simpin', whatever you label it as, came, but I was still in and out, but I had a good female by my side to encourage me to do good with love. Next came commitment, so we took the next step, and she was pregnant. I was on the run for a violation. Back came the Ranch, and I ran to see my baby born. Some say it was wrong, but I had to see a once-in-a lifetime thing, so my daughter Karissa A. O. was born, November 4th, 2004 at 02:30 p.m. (no words can explain the feeling). I would be lying if I told you I didn't cry, so time came and I turned myself in.

Back to the Ranch with a five-month program. Eight days, I was out on the run due to a gang-riot at James Ranch (which caused dogs and the fence) so my promises to my baby's momma flew out the window (plus my constant cheating, lying, and things I've done, I don't remember) and so I sought a current solution to my permanent problem. The shhh I don't get is how people, including myself, can have something so good and treat it like shhh? Then, when it's gone, you regret the things you've done?

So, back to my story, I was locked up again, this time for 15 months. Then, sent to L.A. That didn't go as planned and I ran. I was on the run and went to my baby momma's for comfort. It wasn't the same. I felt hurt and turned to the 'hood for compassion. They welcomed me with open arms and I received gang-related tats on my face. Now, I'm here in the max. unit counting my chances

I wonder where I went wrong in life. I see similar faces here with me, wearing the facial expression I wear: The mask of change without the opportunity to. I've came to the conclusion that time waits for no one. I see my mother and father doing good and I'm still doing and singing the same old song. I went to court and I should be out to County on the 29th. I've been here and it's time for me to exit out of this facility. I just want to give thanks to the staff for keeping it real. I hope everyone can relate and feel what I've been through.

Dear Friends At The Beat Within

My name is Reno Bragg and I found this address in a resource guide I obtained through a gentleman who brings in service to our prison. I am currently incarcerated at Riverfront State Prison in Camden, NJ.

I am 30 something bi-male who has been locked up for 2 years 8 months. While being bi and incarcerated I have been able to abstain from a physical relationship here in prison. I look at my time as an opportunity to heal myself all inclusively. After being down for some time now I find myself with the need to express myself freely.

I grew up in Philly and was introduced to the Grateful Dead at the ripe old age of fourteen. I started to tour with the Dead and landed in Aspen, CO at 15 where I would work and ski during the season and tour with the dead spring, summer and fall. I met a bi-woman on tour and married her at 17. She would die from a drug overdose at a Deet in San Francisco)ead show in NY in 1993. A month to the day after that my father, who was also bi, was murdered in a prison in Philly by prison guards. These events led me into a vicious cycle of addiction, which led me to commit a couple of non-violent crimes, which in turn, led me to Riverfront.

I am not a bad guy and have made some real progress with the issues that allowed me to walk on that not so wholesome path. I did not come to prison until the age of 30 and don't intend to return. My first year and 8 months here in the NJ penal system were a horrific experience, which took me through 5 of NJ's roughest prisons. I am now here at Riverfront, which has a new cutting edge program that I have been involved with since it's inception last November. It is drawn from Landmark Education. It deals with transformation as opposed to change.

My need for expression has brought me to the here and now reaching out to you. I would very much so enjoy being in correspondence with like-minded individuals. I have made some mistakes in my life but have a lot of life experiences, from a variety of sources, that I would love to and find the need to share with whoever may be open to sharing with me.

I hope this correspondence was not too forward and I'll look forward to a response if appropriate.

I hope all is well out there in the city by the bay. I have spent some time out there on Haight (Street) as well as other area's of your wonderful city. I look forward to the day I'm able to return.

Sincerely yours,

RENO BRAGG ***We know that while incarcerated being the 'new booty' can be very difficult. You don't know what's going to happen, you haven't got a steady routine, and you get attention from a whole lot of people you don't necessarily want attention from. Here at The Beat it's a little different. We try to welcome as many people as we can no matter what their beliefs or background. This next writer is a Beat Within 'new booty' and we're welcoming him with arms open wide. In his letter to us, he divulges information about himself that's very personal like his sexual orientation and we must recognize how strong a person it takes to be real about that in the environment he's in. And we're sure he's had experiences with people giving him a hard time, yet it doesn't change how he feels. Everyone knows we appreciate writers that are as real as this one. Welcome to our family. As long as you keep writing, we'll keep publishing. We are now your stage, so create away. Oh, one request, tell The Beat about following the Dead and what their music means to you! Thanks. Reno is writing from Riverfront State Prison in Camden, New Jersey. That's a long ways away, but it never stopped us from embracing someone before.***

I look at my time as an opportunity to heal myself all inclusively. After being down for some time now I find myself with the need to express myself freely.

Something Pure

There is something pure inside of me that has always been a part of me. It has shown through me despite me — through the darkest depths of addiction — through the emotions caused by death — through the depravity, hopelessness and despair. Some call it the soul — some the spirit. Throughout history there have been many names for this "something" inside of we humans.

For the first time in my life I can truly begin to see that this "something" feels that it has an opportunity to shine through stronger than it has ever shone before. This essence of who I really am and really can be seems to be growing for the first time that I can recall. It is finally being nurtured as never before. It is the part of me that is concerned for those around me and wants to help them see the essence inside of them. I could call it compassion or empathy, but no matter what I call it is something very pure — very true to itself. It is unaltered by things I have done in the past. It is affected by what my mind tends to make up as the future.

I look to that pure something for guidance in my recovery — my relationship with my loved ones. My relationship with those I have met along the way and those who I've yet to meet. It seems to be the most precious gift I have discovered thus far in my daily reprieve from active addiction. Thank you!

SMILEY ***From one of CYA's most notorious institutions, we bring you a new writer with a letter wanting to be a part of The Beat Within family. Writing a letter from N.A. Chaderjian in Stockton, CA, Smiley speaks a little bit about his experience in CYA and also about what led up to it. He also offers some advice to the youngsters that keep going in and out of juvenile hall. Well, with that letter you are now a part of The Beat Within family. The best way to get a subscription is to write us a piece. It could be an essay, poem, rap, or whatever else you can write. Our main objective is to teach and learn, so hit us with something educational and from the heart.***

'Cause of those stupid choices I made I'm now living in a box with a four inch by twenty inch window in Chad.

The Beat Within

What's up with it? How are you all doing? This is my first time dropping a few lines to tell y'all I hope I can be a part of The Beat Within fam.

The name is Smiley from the city of Roseville. I'm currently locked up in CYA doing my seven-year sentence. I have twenty-seven months left 'till I get my freedom back. I'm eighteen years old. I been locked up since the age of fourteen.

My whole life changed when I started kicking it with the homies. Getting high, drunk, going to parties, have sex with whatever girl I can. 'Cause of those stupid choices I made I'm now living in a box with a four inch by twenty inch window in Chad. I'm in it 23 hours a day and only have one hour to go outside and enjoy the air. I only get to see my family one hour every week. But I am glad that I do get to go home one day. I was looking at a life sentence but God was with me and blessed me with juvenile life in CYA.

To all you people out there who be in and out of juvenile hall, you people better make it your last 'cause CYA is not a place to live for a few years. Especially Chad

Well folks remain one step ahead and most importantly keep your head up. Don't let no one bring you down.

DINA MARIA DE TILLIO

Writing from the Connecticut Correctional Facility in Niantic, Connecticut, we bring you a woman who really wants to let her daughter know she cares — a woman we love hearing from in The Beat. It must be difficult being a mother that's incarcerated because we know incarceration, if nothing else, gives you plenty of time to yourself. And when we usually have time to ourselves and aren't bombarded by other things, thoughts come to our minds that we may not like thinking about. In Dina's case, maybe it's, "Damn, why did I do what I did to bring me here, away from my daughter?" These sort of thoughts can haunt us in a situation where we're physically powerless. We're glad we could provide a service to let her get some of these things out as a way to come to terms with those thoughts. We're sure she'll get out and be the mother 'Shannon Maureen O'Leary' needs. And when her daughter gets older, Dina will be able to show her this and let her know how much she truly cares. Thank you for such thoughtful poems Dina.

Shannon Maureen O'Leary

Hello my precious little Bumble Bee
That you was on your first Halloween.
I can't wait to hold you so tight,
And make a very important promise,
There will never ever be no more fights
I hit my bottom, never thought that
Saying would come out of my mouth.
Please trust the new me, that's what I'm about
Looking at your pictures day in and day out,
A very strong resemblance in you as you start to sprout.
I will surely tell you this, we will never again be apart!
When I look at you, such a blessing you
Are, you shine so bright like a star.
I thank God everyday that he's giving me a new chance to be a better
Mother to my little princess.

To My Beautiful Daughter

Shannon Maureen O'Leary

I think of you a lot, night and day.
I cry for you at night, write to you in day
Worried about a lot. If you are missing,
And wanting me …
Mommy will stay strong for you, I
Will never let you go again, that's my word.
Hold on tight, sweetheart. We will soon
Make it to the end of this very distracting road.
Praying for you every night, had a dream
We was flying a kite. Hope all is good that's
What I was told. Please keep your head
Up high, and try not to cry. You're my world,
My heart, my life, that's why
I hold on so tight, without you
I have no reason to fight…
We will be together very soon, I'm very,
Very sorry this had happened to you.
Never again this will be. We will live our life
Together, just you and me, as peaceful as can be …
There will be no more interruptions
That will cause a flee, trust me, Shannon,
We will be as happy as we can be, you're all mine
Yes indeed …
Oh also you are so very pretty just
Like your mommy.
Lots of love, sweet little angel at God.
I love you, you are number one.
Just hold on baby the time will soon come…
I thank your Auntie Antonia and your grandma that you are with them.
I thank God so very much you was not put in the system!
I love you so very much Shannon.
Love, your mommy, that truly is so very, very sorry!

Just hold on baby the time will soon come...
I thank your Auntie Antonia and your grandma that you are with them.

NICK FLOYD

With all that's going on in this man's life, he still finds time to drop a line every now and then. Obviously in touch with his spirituality, he gives us some 'light,' if you will, to help us through some of our 'dark' times. It's not everyday we find someone as courageous as he is for bringing light to even the darkest experiences. And if you like that one, or even if you don't, you'll definitely enjoy his closing poem about how he feels about society. Brilliant work from an even more brilliant writer, who once upon a time graced our page from the max unit in 150 aka Alameda County Juvenile Hall. Thank you for blessing us... Today he's writing from San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, CA.

Please, Deliver My Soul

They say were a menace to society. Damn ain't that a joke.
If it wasn't for George Bush the United States wouldn't be broke.
They got money to build prisons, but not schools.
What do they think, were a bunch of fools?
The system ain't about rehabilitation;
It's all about condemnation.
They're afraid of us exposing the truth.
I may be young, but I still wanna help today's youth.
We're losing a lot of youngsters to the streets.
The devil is out there playing for keeps.
Unity and God is our weapons of defeat.
They tried to shatter my dreams, but I will succeed by any means. Adolescence tried to break me, streets tried to make me,
And the devil tried to take me.
Through it all, I still stand strong.
I know I've done a lot of wrong,
But why did I have to suffer for so damn long?
Lord Jesus, please deliver my soul.
For you are the only one who can make me whole.

Good Or Evil?

Surrounded by a battlefield by good and evil.
Haunted by Satan and damnation.
Cries of pain and agony asking for another chance.
Faced with a new obstacle each and every day.
Enemies wishing failure upon us.
Death in the corner of our eyes.
The belly of the beast starving and trying to take a bite out of us.
However, we all have light at the end of the tunnel.
If darkness surrounds us we must reach for the light above us.
If the devil stalks us, we must plead the blood of Jesus on ourselves.
As long as you walk with the almighty success will be yours.
If you choose darkness agony will be yours to keep.
The day is near when the choice will be the light or the dark.
Everyday we live it should be for our almighty.
Fear of anything is not an option.
This is a battle we can fight with or without armor.
The light is your armor and the dark is nothing.
Our only two weapons are honor and love,
while our enemies have dishonor and hate.
The light will prevail while the dark will diminish.
The choice is yours.
Which side do you want to be on in the battlefield of good or evil?

Greetings

I would like to start this letter off by telling you about myself. I am a convict of 20 years, my name is Michael and as a youth, I grew up without parents, always being shipped from one group home to another. Always sad I could not be normal like other kids. Always wanting to be accepted, maybe a hug, pat on the back, made to feel good, smiled at, told it was going to be just fine. Or someone who would really listen to what and how I felt, a shoulder to lean on. A mother or a father maybe even a sister or brother, "A Family"... Love... a four letter word with so much power... I love me today.

Now I believe we can learn from our past, to make a better future for our youth of today. I want to be a youth counselor, because I've been there. This is a little something I wrote, YOUTH, I speak out of love to you, and "there is so much knowledge to gain to stay away from the pain, the game, doesn't take life in vain, because you are who remains, don't be lame." There's no shame, to... "Love yourself!"

I look back at my life and see a lot of tears, a lot of feeling down. A lot of wasting time feeling sorry for myself, "why me?" life is what you make it. I chose to be in a disruptive group in prison. Thought I would find love and acceptance! I found what I was looking for, being cool (so I thought) I was 18 years old when I was placed in prison. So, I always thought by listening to older home boys, saying do this and do that for us and we'll get this, take care of you, "all that." But the only thing was I could not understand why this love hurt so much after receiving more time for being cool. Be accepted! This didn't feel right. So my heart just hardened. Now I call it a "fake love" Yea, it might feel and seem like love, but it's not! Just like the so called homeboys that were going to be there no matter what!! I got stabbed 23 times and not a homeboy around to help. Every one of them ran the other way.

MICHAEL ***We received this next letter to the youth about three months ago and now that it's finally being published, the writer is about to get out and go home. He's finishing up a twenty-year sentence and will finally be freed in a couple of weeks. Damn, twenty years is a long time. He's going to trip out when he sees cell phones, high definition televisions, and even the Internet. Things have changed tremendously since the 80's. We'll see how things turn out hopefully. As for the rest of you, please read on because again, these OG's are inspired to teach. He's teaching from Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, CA.***

Please, youth, don't be fooled. It will cost you your life. Now I suffer from a different kind of pain, "a memory." All 20 years I've wasted, but all 20 years get me to one point in my life, I got a second chance at life, I almost died. So today I love me. Because I get on my knees, and pray... don't take 20 years to get it right. There's so much to life. The reason I write this letter was, 150 crew, Lo, Blance and Lil' Ant. You guys have skills, you already know what I say, feels! Be a leader of the youth of today not a follower of yesterday.

Ms. Henry 150 Crew counselor is "love." Let her shine in your mind, she will teach you something, help prepare you for a life. I wish I would have paid attention to the counselors more. But we all make mistakes in life. It's how we learn from them that makes us strong. Just because you would like the good in life, like a job, a good home, and a good family, nice car, having real friends, going to the mall, this is what life is all about. Take a moment and see the trees, birds and bees, swim in the lake, a pool, ride a bike, fly a kite, don't worry about what you did, just be a kid. Love yourself... Be FREE!

Well, it's been really great to be able to have a moment of your time. This is the very first letter I have had a chance to write to a youth facility. If it touches anyone's heart, I am happy I've done my part! I am being released on 10/10/2006. I will have a chance that all of us want! Please never let anyone stand in your way to reaching your goal... Life.

With Respects,

Take a moment and see the trees, birds and bees, swim in the lake, a pool, ride a bike, fly a kite, don't worry about what you did, just be a kid. Love yourself . . . Be FREE!

LIL' RHINO ***Writing from California State Prison in Chino, CA, we give you a man who tackles the idea of what it means to be a leader and a follower. The title suggests a task that on the surface looks 'impossible,' but when you read on, you'll begin to understand what the writer is talking about. We see it around us all the time. Where people can make an experience that's so hard to deal with look simple. Some of those people are just covering up their worries while others genuinely deal with situations in that manner. For why stress on the inevitable if you're going to have to deal with it anyway. We like what he wrote about and love this first time writer. So please, open your ears for a minute and let Lil' Rhino massage your mind.***

The Impossible Situation Made Simple

As an inmate just convicted and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison "everything seems impossible" just waking up to another day is a grievous task, making it to lunchtime? Wow! And the thought of helping someone else in need seems sane. But how does a person face an impossible situation? By having faith or maybe helping others to keep their faith?

Mark 11:22-23 says "And issues said unto them have faith in God. For verily I say unto you that whosoever shall say unto this mountain be moved and be cast into this sea and shall not doubt in this heart. But shall believe that what he says will happen. He shall have whatsoever he asks." Often the "impossible situation" distinguishes a leader from a follower. Leaders often encourage others to deal with "impossible tasks" rather than easy ones. This helps build self-assurance, increases teamwork and helps develop a sound faith. A true leader must rise to face baffling circumstances and complex problems. And if leaders are to survive they must view the difficult as common place and the complex as normal (J. Oswald Sanders) 50 in a 25 to life situation. Thinking of others in place of ourselves. So helping you is helping me. So the right answer to facing the "impossible"?

First and foremost we must have faith in God to give us strength and patience to charge at lead. Second, we must stop feeling selfish and feeling sorry for ourselves and must step up into a positive leadership position. And third we must encourage others to toss aside the easy situation in order to deal with this "impossible situation" — bypass easy for difficult! Whether we have committed a serious sin such as murder or lesser sin such as telling a "little white lie" we must sincerely ask forgiveness. Then take a look at the consequences of our actions. Accept these said consequences then instead of feeling sorry for ourselves. We will help ourselves by helping others. Not to mention how awesome it makes you feel to help others in need.

But wait, please let me backtrack real quick. Most important of all is that decision you make from the start do you fight or flight? Do we give it a shot, or not? If not then we're left to wonder if we would've or could've succeeded! Do not fear failure because failure can teach us into stronger leaders perhaps even stronger than a leader who never experienced those failures. So even if you don't succeed in your first go around, at least you gave it a shot! And will keep at it until you succeed. Nothing is impossible with God! Which has inspired me to keep faith and never quit we will succeed eventually and getting up to face our "opponent" this devil or an "impossible situation" will only build our leadership and faith to strength more solid than steel.

. . . if alls you know is gang banging, sellin' dope and sex, you need to sit back to take a long look at what's laying before you. That's life in prison and gettin' lit up. It's up to you. And don't blame how you grew up. I used to be you and now look at me. Por favor, build yourself in a positive manner.

check out the rest of Samuel Capers' BWO piece on page 39